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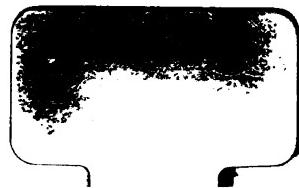
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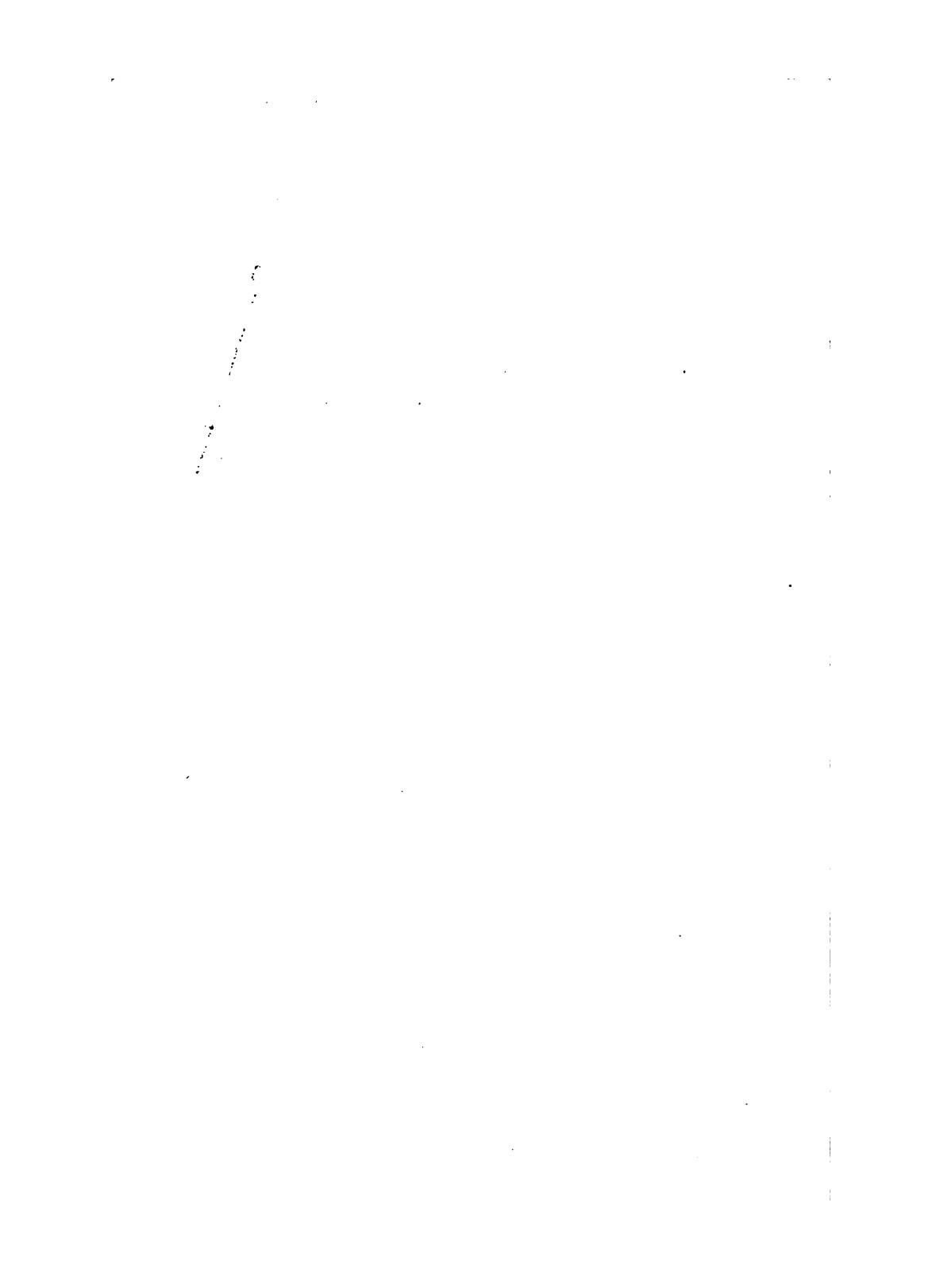
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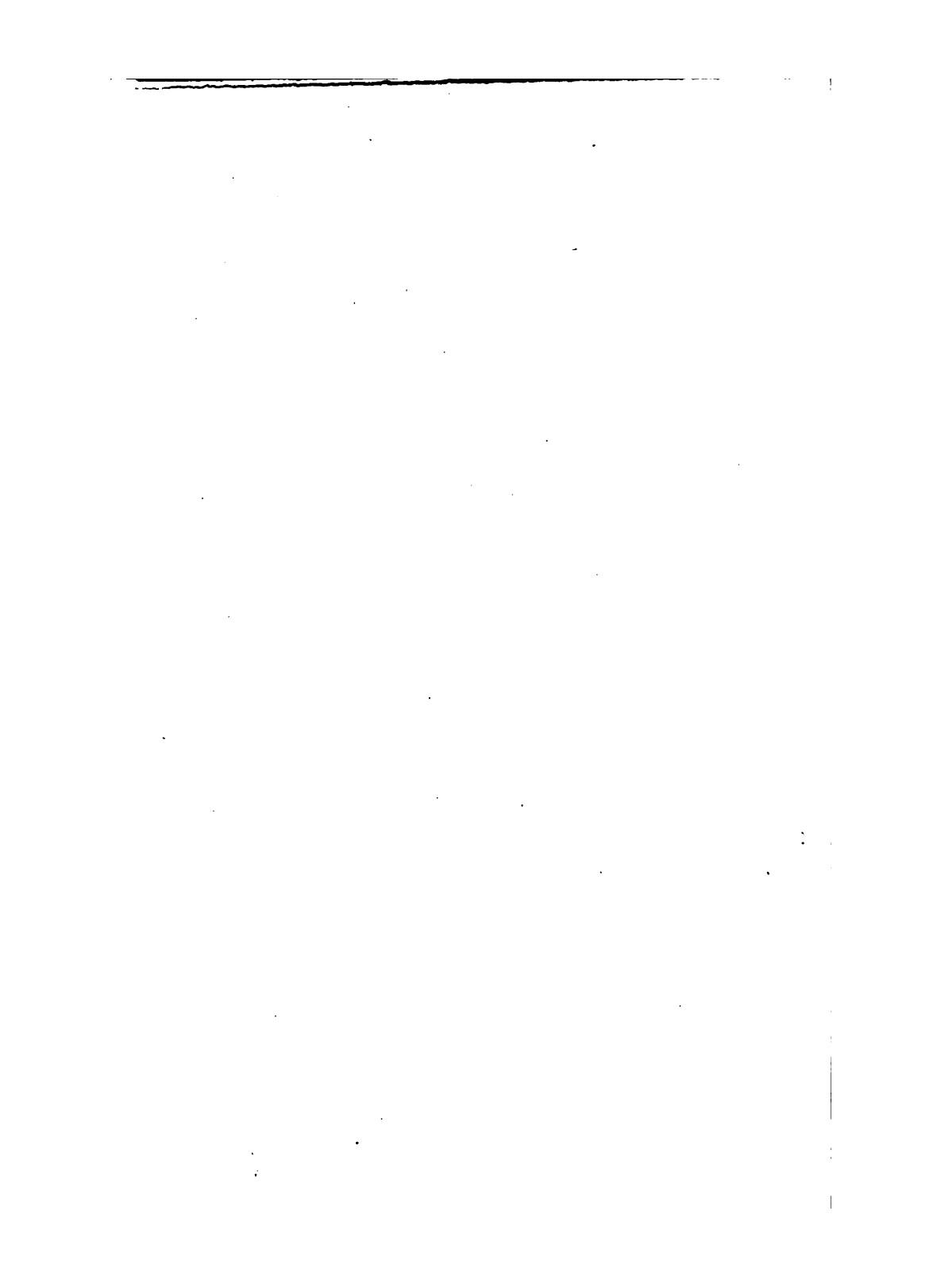






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A LIFE'S SECRET.



# A LIFE'S SECRET.

BY

MRS. HENRY WOOD,

AUTHOR OF "EAST LYNNE," ETC., ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CHARLES W. WOOD, 18, TAVISTOCK ST., STRAND  
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## PREFACE.

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DURING the last twelve months I have received many different applications, requesting me to publish "A Life's Secret," in book form. It was written six years ago, and appeared in "The Leisure Hour," in 1862. These applications have been made to me—not on account of any merit in the story calling particularly for republication, but because some of the chief incidents depicted in it turn upon a strike: and strikes, as we all know, have been latterly growing into notoriety.

At first I would not listen to the requests: for reasons that I gave, and also that the

story did not appear to me to be so eligible for republication, as some works that I have written. But the step has been so pressed upon me, and from quarters bearing weight, that I have at length yielded. It is thought that the pictures of the social misery induced by the strike (or lock-out), as described in the story, and which it fell to my lot to see something of, may possibly be felt as a warning and act for good now. The scenes, however, are touched upon, rather than elaborated: the work having been made of necessity short, to suit the periodical for which it was destined.

The appearance of the story in 1862 did not please everybody, and angry remonstrances came down on the managers of "The Leisure Hour." The tenor of its sentiments was not liked: and one gentleman, who filled a somewhat conspicuous part in its pages, was particularly repudiated—Mr.

Samuel Shuck. This gave rise to a short, spontaneous note from the editor—reinserted here at the end of Chapter I. of the second part: and, subsequently, to the following note from myself :—

“ In writing this story the author’s object has not been to deal with the vexing questions between masters and men, between capital and labour, about which there must always be conflicting opinions, so much as to depict the injurious social results which these quarrels produce, and the misery they leave behind them. It was written in the kindest, heartiest spirit towards the men, and in the truest sympathy with their suffering families.—*May, 1862.*”

Every word of this last note I would repeat now: and also the opinions expressed in the work, as to strikes and the social ill they bring. They can but be productive of mischief, both to masters and men. In 1862, the disaffection lay, comparatively speaking, in a nut-shell ; in 1867, it has become a stupendous evil ; and none, I think, can foresee where the evil will end. I presume not to touch upon the political bearings of

the question, leaving them to wiser heads than mine: but if the book shall cause even one workman to stand bravely to his daily labour, in the teeth of adverse counsels and offered hindrances, and so avert seasons of bitter suffering from his family, I shall be thankful to have sent it forth.

It is republished by the kind permission of the proprietors of "The Leisure Hour."

E. W.

*October, 1867.*

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# A LIFE'S SECRET.

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## PART THE FIRST.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### WAS THE LADY MAD ?

ON the outskirts of Ketterford, a town of some note in the heart of England, stood, a few years ago, a white house, its green lawn, surrounded by shrubs and flowers, sloping down to the high road. It probably stands there still, looking as if not a day had passed over its head since, for houses can be renovated and made, so to say, new again, unlike men and women. A cheerful bright, handsome house, of moderate size, the residence of Mr. Thornimett.

At the distance of a short stone's-throw, towards the open country, were sundry workshops and sheds—a large yard intervening between them and the house. They belonged to Mr. Thornimett; and the timber and other characteristic materials lying about the yard would have proclaimed their owner's trade without the aid of the lofty sign-board—"Richard Thornimett, Builder and Contractor." His business was extensive for a country town.

Entering the house by the pillared portico, and crossing the black-and-white floor-cloth of the hall to the left, you came to a room whose windows looked towards the timber-yard. It was fitted up as a sort of study, or counting-house, though the real business counting-house was at the works. Matting was on its floor; desks and stools stood about; maps and drawings, plain and coloured, were on its walls; not finished and beautiful landscapes, such as issue from the hands of modern artists, or have descended to us from the great masters, but skeleton designs of various buildings—churches,

bridges, terraces—plans to be worked out in actuality, not to be admired on paper. This room was chiefly given over to Mr. Thornimett's pupil: and you may see him in it now.

A tall, gentlemanly young fellow, active and upright; his name, Austin Clay. It is Easter Monday in those long-past years—and yet not so very long past, either—and the works and yard are silent to-day. Strictly speaking, Austin Clay can no longer be called a pupil, for he is twenty-one, and his articles are out. The house is his home; Mr. and Mrs. Thornimett, who have no children of their own, are almost as his father and mother. They have said nothing to him about leaving, and he has said nothing to them. The town, in its busy interference, gratuitously opined that “Old Thornimett would be taking him into partnership.” Old Thornimett had given no indication of what he might intend to do, one way or the other.

Austin Clay was of good parentage, of gentle birth. Left an orphan at the age of

fourteen, with very small means, not sufficient to complete his education, Ketterford wondered what was to become of him, and whether he had not better get rid of himself by running away to sea. Mr. Thornimett stepped in and solved the difficulty. The late Mrs. Clay—Austin's mother—and Mrs. Thornimett were distantly related, and perhaps a certain sense of duty in the matter made itself heard ; that, at least, combined with the great fact that the Thornimett household was childless. The first thing they did was to take the boy home for the Christmas holidays ; the next, was to tell him he should stay there for good. Not to be adopted as their son, not to leave him a fortune hereafter, Mr. Thornimett took pains to explain to him, but to make him into a man, and teach him to earn his own living.

“ Will you be apprenticed to me, Austin ? ” subsequently asked Mr. Thornimett.

“ Can't I be articled, sir ? ” returned Austin, quickly.

“ Articled ? ” repeated Mr. Thornimett,

with a laugh. He saw what was running in the boy's mind. He was a plain man himself ; had built up his own fortunes just as he had built the new house he lived in ; had risen, in fact, as many a working man does rise : but Austin's father was a gentleman. " Well, yes, you can be articled, if you like it better," he said ; " but I shall never call it anything but apprenticed ; neither will the trade. You'll have to work, young sir."

" I don't care how hard I work, or what I do," cried Austin, earnestly. " There's no degradation in work."

Thus it was settled ; and Austin Clay became bound pupil to Richard Thornimett.

" Old Thornimett and his wife have done it out of charity," quoth Ketterford.

No doubt they had. But as the time passed on, they grew very fond of him. He was an open-hearted, sweet-tempered, generous boy, and one of them at least, Mr. Thornimett, detected in him the qualities that make a superior man. Privileges were

accorded him from the first: the going on with certain of his school duties, for which masters came to him out of business hours—drawing, mathematics, and modern languages chiefly—and Austin went on himself with Latin and Greek. With the two latter Mrs. Thronimett waged perpetual war. What would be the use of them to him, she was always asking, and Austin, in his pleasant, laughing way, would rejoin that they might help to make him a gentleman. He was that already: Austin Clay, though he might not know it, was a true gentleman born.

Had they repented their bargain?—He was twenty-one now, and out of his articles, or his time, as it was commonly called. No, not for an instant. Never a better servant had Richard Thronimett; never, he would have told you, one so good. With all his propensity to be a “gentleman,” Austin Clay did not shrink from his work; but did it thoroughly. His master in his wisdom had caused him to learn his business practically; but, that accomplished, he

kept him to over-looking, and to other light duties, just as he might have done by a son of his own. It had told well.

Easter Monday, and a universal holiday. Mr. Thornimett had gone out on horseback, and Austin was in the pupil's room. He sat at a desk, his stool on the tilt, one hand unconsciously balancing a ruler, the other supporting his head, which was bent over a book.

“Austin!”

The call, rather a gentle one, came from outside the door. Austin, buried in his book, did not hear it.

“Austin Clay!”

He heard that, and started up. The door opened in the same moment, and an old lady, dressed in delicate lavender print, came briskly in. Her cap, of a round, old-fashioned shape, was white as snow, and a bunch of keys hung from her girdle. It was Mrs. Thornimett.

“So you are here!” she exclaimed, advancing to him with short, quick steps, a sort of trot. “Sarah said she was sure Mr.

Austin had not gone out. And now, what do you mean by this?" she added, bending her spectacles, which she always wore, on his open book. "Confining yourself in-doors this lovely day over that good-for-nothing Hebrew stuff!"

Austin turned his eyes upon her with a pleasant smile. Deep-set grey eyes they were, earnest and truthful, with a great amount of thought in them for a young man. His face was a pleasing, good-looking face, without being a handsome one, its complexion pale, clear, and healthy, and the hair rather dark. There was not much of beauty in the countenance, but there was plenty of firmness and good sense.

"It is not Hebrew, Mrs. Thornimett. Hebrew and I are strangers to each other. I am only indulging myself with a bit of old Homer."

"All useless, Austin. I don't care whether it is Greek or Hebrew, or Latin or French. To pore over those rubbishing dry books whenever you get the chance, does

you no good. If you did not possess a constitution of iron, you would have been laid upon a sick-bed long ago."

Austin laughed outright. Mrs. Thornimett's prejudices against what she called "learning," had grown into a proverb. Never having been troubled with much herself, she, like the Dutch professor told of by George Primrose, "saw no good in it." She lifted her hand and closed the book.

"May I not spend my time as I like upon a holiday?" remonstrated Austin, half vexed, half in good humour.

"No," said she, authoritatively ; "not when the day is warm and bright as this. We do not often get so fair an Easter. Don't you see that I have put off my winter clothing?"

"I saw that at breakfast."

"Oh, you did notice that, did you? I thought you and Mr. Thornimett were both buried in that newspaper. Well, Austin, I never make the change till I think warm weather is really coming in : and so it ought

to be, for Easter is late this year. Come, put that book up."

Austin obeyed, a comical look of grievance on his face. "I declare you order me about just as you did when I came here first, a miserable little muff of fourteen. You'll never get another like me, Mrs. Thorneimett. As if I had not enough out-door work every day in the week! And I don't know where on earth to go to. It's like turning a fellow out of house and home!"

"You are going out for me, Austin. The master left a message for the Lowland farm, and you shall take it over, and stay the day with them. They will make as much of you as they would of a king. When Mrs. Milton was here the other day, she complained that you never went over now; she said she supposed you were growing above them."

"What nonsense!" said Austin, laughing. "Well, I'll go there for you at once, without grumbling. I like the Miltons."

" You can walk, or you can take the pony gig : whichever you like."

" I will walk," replied Austin with alacrity, putting his book inside the large desk. " What is the message, Mrs. Thornimett ? "

" The message——"

Mrs. Thornimett came to a sudden pause, very much as if she had fallen into a dream. Her eyes were gazing from the window into the far distance, and Austin looked in the same direction : but there was not anything to be seen.

" There's nothing there, lad. It is but my own thoughts. Something is troubling me, Austin. Don't you think the master has seemed very poorly of late ? "

" N—o," replied Austin, slowly, and with some hesitation, for he was half doubting whether something of the sort had not struck him. Certainly the master—as Mr. Thornimett was styled indiscriminately on the premises both by servants and work-people, so that Mrs. Thornimett often fell into the same habit—was not the brisk man

he used to be. "I have not noticed it particularly."

"That is like the young ; they never see anything," she murmured, as if speaking to herself. "Well, Austin, I have ; and I can tell you that I do not like the master's looks, or the signs I detect in him. Especially did I not like them when he rode forth this morning."

"All that I have observed is, that of late he seems to be disinclined for business. He seems heavy, sleepy, as though it were a trouble to him to rouse himself ; and he complains sometimes of headache. But, of course——"

"Of course, what ?" asked Mrs. Thornimett. "Why do you hesitate ?"

"I was going to say that Mr. Thornimett is not as young as he was," continued Austin, with some deprecation.

"He is sixty-six, and I am sixty-three. But, you must be going. Talking of it, will not mend it. And the best part of the day is passing."

"You have not given me the message," he

said, taking up his hat which lay beside him.

"The message is this," said Mrs. Thornimett, lowering her voice to a confidential tone, as she glanced round to see that the door was shut. "Tell Mr. Milton that Mr. Thornimett cannot answer for that timber merchant about whom he asked. The master fears he might prove a slippery customer; he is a man whom he himself would trust as far as he could see, but no farther. Just say it into Mr. Milton's private ear, you know."

"Certainly. I understand," replied the young man, turning to depart.

"You see now why it might not be convenient to despatch any one but yourself. And, Austin," added the old lady, following him across the hall, "take care not to make yourself ill with their Easter cheesecakes. The Lowland farm is famous for them."

"I will try not," returned Austin.

He looked back at her, nodding and laughing as he traversed the lawn, and from thence struck into the open road. His way

led him past the workshops, closed then, even to the gates, for Easter Monday in that part of the country is a universal holiday. A few minutes, and he turned into the fields; a welcome change from the dusty road. The field way might be a little longer, but it was altogether pleasanter. Easter was late that year, as Mrs. Thornimett observed, and the season was early. The sky was blue and clear, the day warm and lovely; the hedges were budding into leaf, the grass was growing, the clover, the buttercups, the daisies were springing; and an early butterfly fluttered past Austin.

"You have taken wing betimes," he said, addressing the unconscious insect. "I think summer must be at hand."

Halting for a moment to watch the flight, he strode on the quicker afterwards. Supple, active, slender, his steps—the elastic, joyous, tread of youth—scarcely seemed to touch the earth. He always walked fast when busy with thought, and his mind was buried in the hint Mrs. Thornimett had spoken, touching her fears for her husband's health.

"If he is breaking, it's through his close attention to business," decided Austin, as he struck into the common and was nearing the end of his journey. "I wish he would take a jolly good holiday this summer. It would set him up; and I know I could manage things without him."

A large common; a broad piece of waste land, owned by the lord of the manor, but appropriated by anybody and everybody; where gipsies encamped and donkeys grazed, and geese and children were turned out to roam. A wide path ran across it, worn by the passage of farmer's carts and other vehicles. To the left it was bordered in the distance by a row of cottages; to the right, its extent was limited, and terminated in some dangerous gravel pits—dangerous, because they were not protected.

Austin Clay had reached the middle of the path and of the common, when he overtook a lady whom he slightly knew. A lady of very strange manners, popularly supposed to be mad, and of whom he once stood in considerable awe, not to say terror, at which he

laughed now. She was a Miss Gwinn, a tall bony woman of remarkable strength, the sister of Gwinn, a lawyer of Ketterford. Gwinn the lawyer did not bear the best of characters, and Ketterford reviled him when they could do it secretly. "A low, crafty, dishonest practitioner, whose hands couldn't have come clean had he spent his days and nights in washing them," was amidst the complimentary terms applied to him. Miss Gwinn, however, seemed honest enough, and but for her rancorous manners Ketterford might have grown to feel a sort of respect for her as a woman of sorrow. She had come suddenly to the place many years before and taken up her abode with her brother. She looked and moved and spoke as one half crazed with grief : what its cause was, nobody knew ; but it was accepted by all, and mysteriously alluded to by herself on occasion.

"You have taken a long walk this morning, Miss Gwinn," said Austin, courteously raising his hat as he came up <sup>11</sup> with her.

She threw back her gray cloak with a quick, sharp movement, and turned upon him. "Oh, is it you, Austin Clay? You startled me. My thoughts were far away: deep upon another. *He* could wear a fair outside, and accost me in a pleasant voice, like you."

"That is rather a doubtful compliment, Miss Gwinn," he returned, in his good-humoured way. "I hope I am no darker inside than out. At any rate, I don't try to appear different from what I am."

"Did I accuse you of it? Boy! you had better go and throw yourself into one of those gravel pits and die, than grow up to be deceitful," she vehemently cried. "Deceit has been the curse of my days. It has made me what I am; one whom the boys hoot after, and call——"

"No, no, not so bad as that," interrupted Austin, soothingly. "You have been cross with them sometimes, and they are insolent, mischievous little `ragamuffins. I am sure every thoughtful person respects you, feeling for your sorrow."

"Sorrow!" she wailed. "Ay. Sorrow, beyond what falls to the ordinary lot of man. The blow fell upon *me*, though I was not an actor in it. When those connected with us do wrong, we suffer; we, more than they. I may be revenged yet," she added, her expression changing to anger. "If I can only come across *him*."

"Across whom?" naturally asked Austin.

"Who are you, that you should seek to pry into my secrets?" she passionately resumed. "I am five-and-fifty to-day—old enough to be your mother, and you presume to put the question to *me*! Boys are coming to something."

"I beg your pardon; I but spoke heedlessly, Miss Gwinn, in answer to your remark. Indeed I have no wish to pry into anybody's business. And as to 'secrets,' I have eschewed them, since, a little chap in petticoats, I crept to my mother's room door to listen to one, and got soundly whipped for my pains."

"It is a secret that you will never know, or anybody else; so put its thoughts from

you. Austin Clay," she added, laying her hand upon his arm, and bending forward to speak in a whisper, "it is fifteen years, this very day, since its horrors came out to me! And I have had to carry it about since, as I best could, in silence and in pain."

She turned round abruptly as she spoke, and continued her way along the broad path ; while Austin Clay struck short off towards the gravel pits, which was his nearest road to the Lowland farm. Silent and abandoned were the pits that day ; everybody connected with them was enjoying holiday with the rest of the world. "What a strange woman she is!" he thought.

It has been said that the gravel pits were not far from the path. Austin was close upon them, when the sound of a horse's footsteps caused him to turn. A gentleman was riding fast down the common path, from the opposite side to the one he and Miss Gwinn had come, and Austin shaded his eyes with his hand to see if it was any one he knew. No ; it was a stranger. A slender

man, of some seven-and-thirty years, tall, so far as could be judged, with thin, prominent aquiline features, and dark eyes. A fine face; one of those that impress the beholder at first sight, as it did Austin, and, once seen, remain permanently on the memory.

"I wonder who he is?" cried Austin Clay to himself. "He rides well."

Possibly Miss Gwinn might be wondering the same. At any rate, she had fixed her eyes on the stranger, and they seemed to be starting from her head with the gaze. It would appear that she recognised him, and with no pleasurable emotion. She grew strangely excited. Her face turned of a ghastly whiteness, her hands closed involuntarily, and, after standing for a moment in perfect stillness, as if petrified, she darted forward in his pathway, and seized the bridle of his horse.

"So! you have turned up at last! I knew—I knew you were not dead!" she shrieked, in a voice of wild raving. "I knew you would some time be brought

face to face with me, to answer for your wickedness."

Utterly surprised and perplexed, or seeming to be, at this summary attack, the gentleman could only stare at his assailant, and endeavour to get his bridle from her hand. But she held it with a firm grasp.

"Let go my horse," he said. "Are you mad?"

"*You* were mad," she retorted, passionately. "Mad in those old days; and you turned another to madness. Not three minutes ago, I said to myself that the time would come when I should find you. Man! do you remember that it is fifteen years ago this very day that the—the—crisis of the sickness came on? Do you know that never afterwards——"

"Do not betray your private affairs to me," interrupted the gentleman. "They are no concern of mine. I never saw you in my life. Take care! the horse will do you an injury."

"No! you never saw me, and you never saw somebody else!" she panted, in a

tone that would have been mockingly sarcastic, but for its wild passion. "You did not change the current of my whole life! you did not turn another to madness! These equivocations are worthy of *you*."

"If you are not insane, you must be mistaking me for some other person," he replied, his tone none of the mildest, though perfectly calm. "I repeat that, to my knowledge, I never set eyes upon you in my life. Woman! have you no regard for your own safety? The horse will kill you! Don't you see that I cannot control him?"

"So much the better if he kills us both," she shrieked, swaying up and down, to and fro, with the fierce motions of the angry horse. "You will only meet your deserts: and, for myself, I am tired of life."

"Let go!" cried the rider.

"Not until you have told me where you live, and where you may be found. I have searched for you in vain. I will have my

revenge; I will force you to do justice.  
You——”

In her sad temper, her dogged obstinacy, she still held the bridle. The horse, a spirited animal, was passionate as she was, and far stronger. He reared bolt upright, he kicked, he plunged; and, finally, he shook off the obnoxious control, to dash furiously in the direction of the gravel pits. Miss Gwinn fell to the ground.

To fall into the pit would be certain destruction to both man and horse. Austin Clay had watched the encounter in amazement, though he could not hear the words of the quarrel. In the humane impulse of the moment, disregarding the danger to himself, he darted in front of the horse, arrested him on the very brink of the pit, and threw him back on his haunches.

Snorting, panting, the white foam breaking from him, the animal, as if conscious of the doom he had escaped, now stood in trembling quiet, obedient to the control of his master. That master threw him-

self from his back, and turned to Austin.

"Young gentleman, you have saved my life."

There was little doubt of that. Austin accepted the fact without any fuss, feeling as thankful as the speaker, and quite unconscious at the moment of the wrench he had given his own shoulder.

"It would have been an awkward fall, sir. I am glad I happened to be here."

"It would have been a *killing* fall," replied the stranger, stepping to the brink, and looking down. "And your being here must be owing to God's wonderful Providence."

He lifted his hat as he spoke, and remained a minute or two silent and uncovered, his eyes closed. Austin, in the same impulse of reverence, lifted his.

"Did you see the strange manner in which that woman attacked me?" questioned the stranger.

"Yes."

"She must be insane."

"She is very strange at times," said Austin. "She flies into desperate passions."

"Passions ! It is madness, not passion. A woman like that ought to be shut up in Bedlam. Where would be the satisfaction to my wife and family, if, through her, I had been lying at this moment at the bottom there, dead ? I never saw her in my life before ; never."

"Is she hurt ? She has fallen down, I perceive."

"Hurt ! not she. She could call after me pretty fiercely when my horse shook her off. She possesses the rage and strength of a tiger. Good fellow ! good Salem ! did a mad woman frighten and anger you ?" added the stranger, soothing his horse. "And now, young sir," turning to Austin, "how shall I reward you ?"

Austin broke into a smile at the notion.

"Not at all, thank you," he said. "One does not merit reward for such a thing as this. I should have deserved sending over after you, had I not interposed. To do

"No fear," said Austin, alluding to the caution.

"She must be lying there to regain the strength exhausted by passion," carelessly remarked the stranger. "Poor thing! it is sad to be mad, though! She is getting up now, I see; I had better be away. That town beyond, in the distance, is Ketterford, is it not?"

"It is."

"Fare you well, then. I must hasten to catch the twelve o'clock train. They have horse-boxes, I presume, at the station?"

"Oh, yes."

"All right," he nodded. "I have received a summons to town, and cannot afford the time to ride Salem home. So we must both get conveyed by train, old fellow"—patting his horse, as he spoke to it. "By the way, though—what is the lady's name?" he halted to ask.

"Gwinn. Miss Gwinn."

"Gwinn? Gwinn? Never heard the name in my life. Fare you well, in all gratitude."

He rode away. Austin Clay looked at the card. It was a private visiting card—"Mr. Henry Hunter" with an address in the corner.

"He must be one of the great London building firm, 'Hunter and Hunter,' thought Austin, depositing the card in his pocket. "First class people. And now for Miss Gwinn."

For his humanity would not allow him to leave her unlooked-after, as the molested and angry man had done. She had risen to her feet, though slowly, as he stepped back across the short worn grass of the common. The fall had shaken her, without doing material damage.

"I hope you are not hurt?" said Austin, kindly.

"A ban light upon the horse!" she fiercely cried. "At my age, it does not do to be thrown on the ground violently. I thought my bones were broken; I could not rise. And he has escaped! Boy! what did he say to you of me—of my affairs?"

spent he ; rich Easter cheesecakes being the least of the seductions he did *not* withstand ; and Ketterford clocks were striking half-past ten as he approached Mrs. Thornimett's. The moonlight walk was delightful ; there was no foreboding of ill upon his spirit, and he turned in at the gate utterly unconscious of the news that was in store for him.

Conscious of the late hour—for they were early people—he was passing across the lawn with a hasty step, when the door was drawn silently open, as if some one stood there watching, and he saw Sarah, one of the two old maid-servants, come forth to meet him. Both had lived in the family for years ; had scolded and ordered Austin about when a boy, to their hearts' content, and for his own good.

“ Why, Sarah, is it you ?” was his gay greeting. “ Going to take a moonlight ramble ?”

“ Where *have* you stayed ?” whispered the woman in evident excitement. “ To think you should be away this night of all others,

Mr. Austin ! Have you heard what has happened to the master ?”

“ No. What ?” exclaimed Austin, his fears taking alarm.

“ He fell down in a fit, over at the village where he went ; and they brought him home, a-frightening us two and the missis almost into fits ourselves. Oh, Master Austin !” she concluded, bursting into tears, “ the doctors don’t think he’ll live till morning. Poor dear old master !”

Austin, half paralysed at the news, stood for a moment against the wall inside the hall. “ Can I go and see him ?” he presently asked.

“ Oh, you may go,” was the answer ; “ the mistress has been asking for you, and nothing rouses *him*. It’s a heavy blow ; but it has its side of brightness. God never sends a blow but he sends mercy with it.”

“ What is the mercy—the brightness ?” Austin waited to ask, thinking she must allude to some symptom of hope. Sarah put her shrivelled old arm on his in solemnity, as she answered it.

"He was fit to be taken. He had lived for the next world while he was living in this. And those that do, Master Austin, never need shrink from sudden death."

## CHAPTER II.

### CHANGES.

To reflect upon the change death makes, even in the petty every-day affairs of life, must always impart a certain awe to the thoughtful mind. On the Easter Monday, spoken of in the last chapter, Richard Thornimett, his men, his contracts, and his business in progress, were all part of the life, the work, the bustle of the town of Ketterford. In a few weeks from that time, Richard Thornimett—who had not lived to see the morning light after his attack—was mouldering in the churchyard; and the business, the workshops, the artisans, all save the dwelling-house, which Mrs. Thornimett retained for herself, had passed into other hands. The name, Richard Thornimett, as one of the citizens of Ketter-

ford had ceased to be : all things were changed.

Mrs. Thornimett's friends and acquaintances had assembled to tender counsel, after the fashion of busy-bodies of the world. Some recommended her to continue the business ; some, to give it up ; some, to take in a gentleman as partner ; some, to pay a handsome salary to an efficient manager. Mrs. Thornimett listened politely to all, without the least intention of acting upon anybody's opinion but her own. Her mind had been made up from the first. Mr. Thornimett had died fairly well off, and everything was left to her — half of the money to be hers for life, and then to go to different relatives ; the other half was bequeathed to her absolutely, and was at her own disposal. Rumours were rife in the town, that, when things came to be realized, she would have about twelve thousand pounds in money, besides other property.

But before making known her decision abroad, she spoke to Austin Clay. They were sitting together one evening when

she entered upon the subject, breaking the silence that reigned with some abruptness.

"Austin, I shall dispose of the business : everything as it stands. And the goodwill."

"Shall you !" he exclaimed, taken by surprise, and his voice betraying a curious disappointment.

Mrs. Thornimett nodded in answer.

"I would have done my best to carry it on for you, Mrs. Thornimett. The foreman is a man of experience ; one we may trust."

"I do not doubt you, Austin ; and I do not doubt him. You have got your head on your shoulders the right way, and you would be faithful and true. So well do I think of your abilities, that, were you in a position to pay down only half the purchase money, I would give you the refusal of the business, and I am certain success would attend you. But you are not ; so that is out of the question."

"Quite out of the question," assented Austin. "If ever I get a business of my

own, it must be by working for it. Have you quite resolved upon giving it up?"

"So far resolved, that the negotiations are already half concluded," replied Mrs. Thornimett. "What should I, a lone woman, do with an extensive business? When poor widows are left badly off, they are obliged to work; but I possess more money than I shall know how to spend. Why should I worry out my hours and days trying to amass more? It would not be seemly. Rolt and Ransom wish to purchase it."

Austin lifted his head with a quick movement. He did not like Rolt and Ransom.

"The only difference we have in the matter, is this: that I wish them to take you on, Austin, and they think they shall find no room for you. Were you a common workman, it would be another thing, they say."

"Do not allow that to be a difference any longer, Mrs. Thornimett," he cried, somewhat eagerly. "I should not care to be under Rolt and Ransom. If they offered

me a place to-morrow, and *carte blanche* as to pay, I do not think I could bring myself to take it."

"Why?" asked Mrs. Thornimett, in surprise.

"Well, they are no favourites of mine. I know nothing against them, except that they are hard men—grinders; but somehow I have always felt a prejudice against that firm. We do have our likes and dislikes, you are well aware. Young Rolt is prominent in the business, too, and I am sure there's no love lost between him and me; we should be at daggers drawn. No, I should not serve Rolt and Ransom. If they succeed to your business, I think I shall go to London and try my fortune there."

Mrs. Thornimett pushed back her widow's cap, to which her head had never yet been able to get reconciled — something like Austin with regard to Rolt and Ransom. "London would not be a good place for you, Austin. It is full of pitfalls for young men."

"So are other places," said Austin, laugh-

ingly, "if young men choose to step into them. I shall make my way, Mrs. Thornimett, never fear. I am thorough master of my business in all its branches, higher and lower, as you know, and I am not afraid of putting my own shoulder to the wheel, if there's necessity for it. As to pitfalls—if I do stumble in the dark into any, I'll manage to scramble out again; but I will try and take care not to step into them wilfully. Had you continued the business, of course I would have remained with you; otherwise, I should like to go to London."

"You can be better trusted, both as to capabilities and steadiness, than some could at your age," deliberated Mrs. Thornimett. "But they are wrong notions that you young men pick up with regard to London. I believe there's not one of you but thinks its streets are sprinkled with diamonds."

"*I don't,*" said Austin. "And while God gives me hands and brains to work with, I would rather earn my diamonds, than stoop to pick them up in idleness."

Mrs. Thornimett paused. She settled her

spectacles more firmly on her eyes, turned them full on Austin, and spoke sharply.

“Were you disappointed when you heard the poor master’s will read ?”

Austin, in return, turned his eyes upon her, and opened them to their utmost width in his surprise. “Disappointed ! No. Why should I be ?”

“Did it never occur to you to think, or to expect, that he might leave you something ?”

“Never,” earnestly replied Austin. “The thought never so much as crossed my mind. Mr. Thornimett had near relatives of his own—and so have you. Who am I, that I should think to step in before them ?”

“I wish people would mind their own business !” exclaimed the old lady, in a vexed tone. “I was gravely assured, Austin, that young Clay felt grievously ill-used at not being mentioned in the will.”

“Did you believe it ?” he rejoined.

“No, I did not.”

“It is utterly untrue, Mrs. Thornimett, whoever said it. I never expected Mr. Thornimett to leave me anything ; therefore,

I could not have been disappointed at the will.

"The poor master knew I should not forget you, Austin ; that is, if you continue to be deserving. Some time or other, when my old bones are laid beside him, you may be the better for a trifle from me. Only a trifle, mind ; we must be just before we are generous."

"Indeed, you are very kind," was Austin Clay's reply ; "but I should not wish you to enrich me at the expense of others who have greater claims." And he fully meant what he said. "I have not the least fear of making my own way up the world's ladder. Do you happen to know anything of the London firm, Hunter and Hunter ?"

"Only by reputation," said Mrs. Thornimett.

"I shall apply to them, if I go to London. They would interest themselves for me, perhaps."

"You'd be sure to do well if you could get in there. But why should they help you more than any other firm would ?"

"There's nothing like trying," replied Austin, too conscious of the evasive character of his reply. He was candour itself; but he feared to speak of the circumstances under which he had met Mr. Henry Hunter, lest Miss Gwinn should find out it was to him he had gone, and so track Mr Henry Hunter home. Austin deemed that it was no business of his to help her to find Mr. Hunter, whether he was or was not the *bête noire* of whom she had spoken. He might have told of the encounter at the time, but for the home calamity that supervened upon it; that drove away other topics. Neither had he mentioned it at the Lowland farm. For all Miss Gwinn's violence, he felt pity for her, and could not expose the woman.

"A first-rate firm, that of Hunter and Hunter," remarked Mrs. Thornimett. "Your credentials will be good also, Austin."

"Yes; I hope so."

It was nearly all that passed upon the subject. Rolt and Ransom took possession of the business, and Austin Clay prepared to depart for London. Mrs. Thornimett felt

sure he would get on well—always provided that he kept out of “pit-falls.” She charged him not to be above his business, but to *work* his way upwards : as Austin meant to do.

A day or two before quitting Ketterford, it chanced that he and Mrs. Thornimett, who were out together, encountered Miss Gwinn. There was a speaking acquaintance between the two ladies, and Miss Gwinn stopped to say a kind word or two of sympathy for the widow and her recent loss. She could be a lady on occasion, and a gentle one. As the conversation went on, Mrs. Thornimett incidentally mentioned that Mr. Clay was going to leave and try his fortune in London.

“ Oh, indeed,” said Miss Gwinn, turning to him, as he stood quietly by Mrs. Thornimett’s side. “ What does he think of doing there ? ”

“ To get a situation, of course. He means first of all to try at Hunter and Hunter’s.”

The words had left Mrs. Thornimett’s lips before Austin could interpose—which he would have given the world to do. But

there was no answering emotion on Miss Gwinn's face.

"Hunter and Hunter?" she carelessly repeated. "Who are they?"

"Hunter Brothers, they are sometimes called," observed Mrs. Thronimett. "It is a building firm of eminence."

"Oh," apathetically returned Miss Gwinn. "I wish you well," she added to Austin.

He thanked her as they parted. The subject, the name, evidently bore for her no interest whatever. Therefore Austin judged, that although she might have knowledge of Mr. Henry Hunter's person, she could not of his name.

## CHAPTER III.

### AWAY TO LONDON.

A HEAVY train, drawn by two engines, was dashing towards London. Whitsuntide had come, and the public took advantage of the holiday, and the trains were crammed. Austin Clay took advantage of it also ; it was a saving to his pocket, the fares having been lowered ; and he rather liked a cram. What he did not like, though, was the being stuffed into a first-class carriage with its warm mats and its cushions. The crowd was so great that people sat indiscriminately in any carriage that came first. The day was intensely hot, and he would have preferred one open on all sides. They were filled, however, before he came. He had left Ketterford, and was on his road to London to seek his fortune—as old stories used to say.

Seated in the same compartment as himself, was a lady with a little girl. The former appeared to be in very delicate health ; she remarked more than once, that she would not have travelled on so crowded a day, had she given it proper thought. The little girl was chiefly remarkable for making herself troublesome to Austin : at least, her mamma perpetually reproached her with doing so. She was a lovely child, with delicately carved features, slightly aquiline, but inexpressibly sweet and charming. A bright colour illumined her cheeks, her eyes were large and dark and soft, and her brown curls were flowing. He judged her to be perhaps eleven years old ; but she was one of those natural, unsophisticated children, who appear much younger than they are. The race has pretty nearly gone out of the world now : I hope it will come back again.

"Florence, how *can* you be so tiresome ? Pushing yourself before the gentleman against that dangerous door ! it may fly open at any moment. I am sure he must be tired of holding you."

Florence turned her bright eyes—sensible, honest eyes, bright though they were—and her pretty hot cheeks upon the gentleman.

"Are you tired, sir?"

Austin smiled. "It would take rather more than this to tire me," he said. "Pray allow her to look out," he added, to the lady, opposite to whom he sat; "I will take every care of her."

"Have you any little girls of your own?" questioned the young damsel.

Austin laughed outright. "No."

"Nor any sisters?"

"Nor any sisters. I have scarcely any relatives in the world. I am not so fortunate as you."

"I have a great many relatives, but no brothers or sisters. I had a little sister once, and she died when she was three years old. Was it not three, mamma?"

"And how old are you?" inquired Austin.

"Oh, pray do not ask," interposed the lady. "She is so thoroughly childish, I am ashamed that anybody should know her age. And yet she does not want sense."

"I was twelve last birthday," cried the young lady, in defiance of all conventionalism. "My cousin Mary is only eleven, but she is a great deal bigger than I."

"Yes," observed the lady, in a tone of positive resentment, "Mary is quite a woman already in ideas and manners: you are a child, and a very backward one."

"Let her be a child, ma'am, while she may," impulsively spoke Austin; "childhood does not last too long, and it never comes again. Little girls are women now-a-days: I think it is perfectly delightful to meet with one like this."

Before they reached London, other passengers had disappeared from the carriage, and they were alone. As they neared the terminus, the young lady was peremptorily ordered to "keep her head in," or perhaps she might lose it.

"Oh dear! if I must, I must," returned the child. "But I wanted to look out for papa; he is sure to be waiting for us."

The train glided into its destination. And the bright quick eyes were roving amidst

the crowd standing on the platform. They rested upon a gentleman.

"There's Uncle Henry! there's Uncle Henry! But I don't see papa. Where's papa?" she called out, as the gentleman saw them and approached.

"Papa's not come; he has sent me instead, Miss Florence." And to Austin Clay's inexpressible surprise, he recognised Mr. Henry Hunter.

"There is nothing the matter? James is not ill?" exclaimed the lady, bending forward.

"No, no; nothing of that. Being a leisure day with us, we thought we would quietly go over some estimates together. James had not finished the calculations, and did not care to be disturbed at them. Your carriage is here."

Mr. Henry Hunter was assisting her to alight as he spoke, having already lifted down Florence. A maid with a couple of carpet bags appeared presently, amidst the bustle, and Austin saw them approach a private carriage. He had not pushed him-

self forward. He did not intend to do so then, deeming it not the most fitting moment to challenge the notice of Mr. Henry Hunter ; but that gentleman's eye happened to fall upon him.

Not at first for recognition. Mr. Hunter felt sure it was a face he had seen recently ; was one he ought to know ; but his memory was puzzled. Florence followed his gaze.

" That gentleman came up in the same carriage with us, Uncle Henry. He got in at a place they called Ketterford. I like him so much."

Austin came forward as he saw the intent look ; and recollection flashed over the mind of Mr. Henry Hunter. He took both the young man's hands in his and grasped them.

" You like him, do you, Miss Florence ? " cried he, in a half joking, half fervent tone. " I can tell you what, young lady ; but for this gentleman, you would no longer have possessed an Uncle Henry to plague ; he would have been dead and forgotten."

A word or two of explanation from Austin, touching what brought him to Lon-

don, and his intention to ask advice of Mr. Henry Hunter. That gentleman replied that he would give it willingly, and at once, for he had leisure on his hands that day, and he could not answer for it that he would have, on another. He gave Austin the address of his office.

“When shall I come, sir?” asked Austin.

“Now, if you can. A cab will bring you. I shall not be there later in the day.”

So Austin, leaving his portmanteau, all the luggage he had at present brought with him, in charge at the station, proceeded in a cab to the address named, Mr. Henry Hunter having driven off in the carriage.

The offices, yard, buildings, sheds, and other places pertaining to the business of Hunter and Hunter, were situated in what may be considered a desirable part of the metropolis. They encroached neither upon the excessive bustle of the city, nor upon the aristocratic exclusiveness of the gay west end, but occupied a situation midway between the two. Sufficiently open was the district in their immediate neighbourhood,

healthy, handsome, and near some fine squares ; but a very, very little way removed, you came upon swarming courts, and close dwellings, and squalor, and misery, and all the bad features of what we are pleased to call Arab life. There are many such districts in London, where wealth and ease contrast with starvation and improvidence, *all but* within view of each other ; the one gratifying the eye, the other causing it pain.

The yard and premises were of great extent. Austin had thought Mr. Thornimett's pretty fair for size ; but he could laugh at them, now that he saw the Messrs. Hunter's. They were inclosed by a wall, and by light iron gates. Within the gates on the left-hand side were the offices, where the indoor business was transacted. A wealthy, important, and highly considered firm was that of the Messrs. Hunter. Their father had made the business what it was, and had bequeathed it to them jointly at his death. James, whose wife and only child you have seen arriving by the train, after a week's

visit to the country, was the elder brother, and was usually styled Mr. Hunter ; the younger was known as Mr. Henry Hunter, and he had a large family. Each occupied a handsome house in a contiguous square.

Mr. Henry Hunter came up almost as Austin did, and they entered the offices. In a private room, warmly carpeted, stood two gentlemen. The one, had he not been so stout, would have borne a great likeness to Mr. Henry Hunter. It was Mr. Hunter. In early life the likeness between the brothers had been remarkable ; the same dark hair and eyes, the well-formed aquiline features, the same active, tall, light figure ; but, of late years, James had grown fat, and the resemblance was in part lost. The other gentleman was Dr. Bevary, a spare man of middle height, the brother of Mrs. James Hunter. Mr. Henry Hunter introduced Austin Clay, speaking of the service rendered him, and broadly saying as he had done to Florence, that but for him he should not now have been alive.

"There you go, Henry," cried Dr. Bevary.

"That's one of your exaggerations, that is : you were always given to the marvellous, you know. Not alive!"

Mr. Henry Hunter turned to Austin. "Tell the truth, Mr. Clay. Should I, or not ?" And Austin smiled, and said he believed *not*.

"I cannot understand it," exclaimed Dr. Bevary, after some explanation had been given by Mr. Henry Hunter. "It is incredible to suppose a strange woman would attack you in that manner, unless she was mad."

"Mad, or not mad, she did it," returned Mr. Henry Hunter. "I was riding Salem—you know I took him with me, in that week's excursion I made at Easter—and the woman set upon me like a tigress, clutching hold of Salem, who won't stand such jokes. In his fury, he got loose from her, dashing he neither knew nor cared whither, and this fine fellow saved us on the very brink of the yawning pit—risking the chance of getting killed himself. Had the horse not been arrested, I don't see how he

could have helped being knocked over with us."

Mr. Hunter turned a warm grateful look on Austin. "How was it you never spoke of this, Henry?" he inquired of his brother.

"There's another curious phase of the affair," laughed Mr. Henry Hunter. "I have had a dislike to speak of it, even to think of it. I cannot tell you why; certainly not on account of the escaped danger. And it was over; so, what signified talking of it?"

"Why did she attack you?" pursued Dr. Bevary.

"She evidently, if there was reason in her at all, mistook me for somebody else. All sorts of diabolical things she was beginning to accuse me of; that of having evaded her for some great number of years, amongst the rest. I stopped her; telling her I had no mind to be the depository of other people's secrets."

"She solemnly protested to me, after you rode away, sir, that you *were* the man who had done her family some wrong," interposed Austin. "I told her I felt certain she was

mistaken: and so drew down her anger upon me."

"Of what nature was the wrong?" asked Dr. Bevary.

"I cannot tell," said Austin. "I seemed to gather from her words that the wrong was upon her family, or upon some portion of her family, rather than upon her. I remember she made use of the expression, that it had broken up her happy home."

"And you did not know her?" exclaimed the doctor, looking at Mr. Henry Hunter.

"Know her?" he returned, "I never set eyes on her in all my life until that day. I never was in the place before, or in its neighbourhood. If I ever did work her wrong, or ill, I must have done it in my sleep; and with miles of distance intervening. Who is she? What is her name? You told it me, Mr. Clay, but I forgot what it was."

"Her name is Gwinn," replied Austin. "The brother is a lawyer and has scraped together a business. One morning, many years ago, a lady arrived at his house, with-

out warning, and took up her abode with him. She turned out to be his sister, and the people at Ketterford think she is mad. It is said they come from Wales. The little boys call after her, ‘the mad Welch woman.’ Sometimes Miss Gwinn.”

“What did you say the name was?” interrupted Dr. Bevary, with startling emphasis. “Gwinn?—and from Wales?”

“Yes.”

Dr. Bevary paused, as if in deep thought. “What is her Christian name?” he presently inquired.

“It is a somewhat uncommon one,” replied Austin. “Agatha.”

The doctor nodded his head, as if expecting the answer. “A tall, spare, angular woman, of great strength,” he remarked.

“Why, what do you know of her?” exclaimed Mr. Henry Hunter to the doctor, in a surprised tone.

“Not a great deal. We medical men come across all sorts of persons occasionally,” was the physician’s reply. And it was given in a concise, laconic manner, as if he did not

care to be questioned further. Mr. Henry Hunter pursued the subject.

"If you know her, Bevary, perhaps you can tell whether she is mad or sane."

"She is sane, I believe : I have no reason to think her otherwise. But she is one who can allow angry passion to master her at moments : I have seen it do so. Do you say her brother is a lawyer ?" he continued, to Austin Clay.

"Yes, he is. And not one of the first water, as to reputation ; a grasping, pettifogging practitioner, who will take up any dirty case that may be brought to him. And in that, I fancy, he is a contrast to his sister ; for, with all her strange ways, I should not judge her to be dishonourable. It is said he speculates, and that he is not over particular whose money he gets to do it with."

"I wonder that she never told me about this brother," dreamily exclaimed the doctor, in an inward tone, as if forgetting that he spoke aloud.

"Where did you meet with her ? When

did you know her?" interposed Mr. Henry Hunter.

"Are you sure that *you* know nothing about her?" was the doctor's rejoinder, turning a searching glance upon Mr. Henry Hunter.

"Come, Bevary, what have you got in your head? I do *not* know her. I never met with her until she saw and accosted me. Are you acquainted with her history?"

"With a dark page in it."

"What is the page?"

Dr. Bevary shook his head. "In the course of a physician's practice he becomes cognisant of many odds and ends of romance, dark or fair; things that he must hold sacred, and may not give utterance to."

Mr. Henry Hunter looked vexed. "Perhaps you can understand the reason of her attacking me?"

"I could understand it, but for your assertion of being a stranger to her. If it is so, I can only believe that she mistook you for another."

"*If* it is so," repeated Mr. Henry Hunter.

"I am not in the habit of asserting an untruth, Bevary."

"Nor, on the other hand, is Miss Gwinn one to be deceived. She is keen as a razor."

"Bevary, what are you driving at?"

"At nothing. Don't be alarmed, Henry. I have no cause to suppose you know the woman, or she you. I only thought—and think—she is one whom it is almost impossible to deceive. It must, however, have been a mistake."

"It was a mistake—so far as her suspicion that she knew me went," decisively returned Mr. Henry Hunter.

"Ay," acquiesced Dr. Bevary. "But here am I, gossiping my morning away, when a host of patients are waiting for me. We poor doctors never get a holiday, as you more favoured mortals do."

He laughed as he went out, nodding a friendly farewell to Austin. Mr. Henry Hunter stepped out after him. Then Mr. Hunter, who had not taken part in the discussion, but had stood looking from the window while they carried it on, wheeled

round to Austin and spoke in a low, earnest tone.

“What *is* this tale—this mystery—that my brother and the doctor seem to be picking up.”

“Sir, I know no more than you have heard me say. I witnessed her attack on Mr. Henry Hunter.”

“I should like to know further about it : about her. Will you—Hush ! here comes my brother back again. Hush !”

His voice died away in the faintest whisper, for Mr. Henry Hunter was already within the room. Was Mr. Hunter suspecting that his brother had more cognizance of the affair than he seemed willing to avow ? The thought, that it must be so, crossed Austin Clay ; or why that warning “hush” twice repeated ?

It happened that business was remarkably brisk that season at Hunter and Hunter’s. They could scarcely get hands enough, or the work done. And when Austin explained the cause which had brought him to town, and frankly proffered the question of whe-

ther they could recommend him to employment; they were glad to offer it themselves. He produced his credentials of capacity and character, and waited. Mr. Henry Hunter turned to him with a smile.

"I suppose you are not above your work, Mr. Clay?"

"I am not above anything in the world that is right, sir. I have come to seek work."

He was engaged forthwith. His duties at present were to lie partly in the counting-house, partly in overlooking the men; and the salary offered was twenty-five pounds per quarter.

"I can rise above that in time, I suppose," remarked Austin, "if I give satisfaction?"

Mr. Hunter smiled. "Ay, you can rise above that, if you choose. But when you get on, you'll be doing, I expect, as some of the rest do."

"What is that, sir?"

"Leaving us, to set up for yourself. Numbers have done so as soon as they have become valuable. I do not speak of the

men, you understand, but of those who have been with us in a higher capacity. A few of the men, though, have done the same ; some have risen into influence."

"How can they do that without capital ?" inquired Austin. "It must take money, and a good deal of it, to set up for themselves."

"Not so much as you may think. They begin in a small way—take piece-work, and work early and late, often fourteen and fifteen hours a day, husbanding their earnings, and getting a capital together by slow but sure degrees. Many of our most important firms have so risen, and owe their present positions to sheer hard work, patience, and energy."

"It was the way in which Mr. Thornimett first rose," observed Austin. "He was once a journeyman at fourteen shillings a week. *He* got together money by working over hours."

"Ay, there's nothing like it for the industrious man," said Mr. Hunter.

Preliminaries were settled, advice given to him where he might find lodgings, and

Austin departed, having accepted an invitation to dine at six at Mr. Henry Hunter's.

And all through having performed an unpremeditated but almost necessary act of bravery.

## CHAPTER IV.

### DAFFODIL'S DELIGHT.

TURNING to the right after quitting the business premises of the Messrs. Hunter, you came to an open, handsome part, where the square in which those gentlemen dwelt was situated, with other desirable squares, crescents, and houses. But, if you turned to the left instead of to the right, you very speedily found yourself in the midst of a dense locality, not so agreeable to the eye or to the senses.

And yet, some parts of this were not much to be complained of, unless you instituted a comparison between them and those open places ; but in this world all things are estimated by comparison. Take Daffodil's Delight, for example. "Daffodil's Delight ! what's that ?" cries the puzzled reader, un-

certain whether it may be a fine picture or something to eat. Daffodil's Delight was nothing more than a tolerably long street, or lane, or double row of houses—wide enough for a street, dirty enough for a lane, the buildings irregular, not always contiguous, small gardens before some, and a few trees scattered here and there. When the locality was mostly fields, and the buildings on them were scanty, a person of the name of Daffodil ran up a few tenements. He found that they let well, and he ran up more, and more, and more, until there was a long, long line of them, and he growing rich. He called the place Daffodil's Delight—which we may suppose expressed his own complacent satisfaction at his success—and Daffodil's Delight it had continued, down to the present day. The houses were of various sizes, and of fancy appearance ; some large, some small ; some rising up like a narrow tower, some but a story high ; some were all windows, some seemed to have none ; some you could only gain by ascending steps ; to others you pitched down as into a cellar ; some lay

back, with gardens before their doors, while others projected pretty nearly on to the street gutter. Nothing in the way of houses could be more irregular ; and, what Mr. Daffodil's motive could have been in erecting such, cannot be conjectured—unless he formed an idea that he would make a venture to suit various tastes and diverse pockets.

Nearly at the beginning of this locality, in its best part, before the road became narrow, there stood a detached white house : one of only six rooms, but superior in appearance, and well kept ; indeed, it looked more like a gentleman's cottage residence, than a working man's. Verandah blinds were outside the windows, and green wire fancy stands held geraniums and other plants on the stone copings, against their lower panes, obviating the necessity for inside blinds. In this house lived Peter Quale. He had begun life carrying hods of mortar for masons, and covering up bricks with straw—a half-starved urchin, his feet as naked as his head, and his body pretty nearly the same. But he was steady, indus-

trious, and persevering—just one of those men that *work on* for decent position, and acquire it. From two shillings per week to four, from four to six, from six to twelve—such had been Peter Quale's beginnings. At twelve shillings he remained for some time stationary, and then his advance was rapid. Now he was one of the superior artizans of the Messrs. Hunters' yard; was, in fact, in a post of trust, and his wages had grown in proportion. Daffodil's Delight said that Quale's earnings could not be less than £150 per annum. A steady, sensible, honest, but somewhat obstinate man, well-read, and intelligent; for Peter, while he advanced his circumstances, had not neglected his mind. He had cultivated that far more than he had his speech or his manner; a homely tone and grammar, better known to Daffodil's Delight than to polite ears, Peter favoured still.

In the afternoon of Whit Monday, the day spoken of already, Peter sat in the parlour of his house, a pipe in his mouth, and a book in his hand. He looked about midway

between forty and fifty, had a round bald head, surmounted just now by a paper cap, a fair complexion, grey whiskers, and a well-marked forehead, especially where lie the perceptive faculties. His eyes were deeply sunk in his head, and he was by nature a silent man. In the kitchen behind, "washing up" after dinner, was his helpmate, Mrs. Quale. Although so well to do, and having generally a lodger, she kept no servant—"wouldn't be bothered with 'em," she said—but did her own work; a person coming in once a week to clean.

A rattling commotion in the street caused Peter Quale to look up from his book. A large pleasure-van was rumbling down it, drawing up at the next door to his.

"Nancy!" called out he to his wife.

"Well?" came forth the answer, in a brisk, bustling voice, from the depths of the kitchen.

"The Shucks, and that lot, be actually going off now!"

The news appeared to excite the curiosity of Mrs. Quale, and she came hastily in; a

dark-eyed, rosy-cheeked little woman, with black curls. She wore a neat white cap, a fresh-looking plum-coloured striped gown of some thin woollen material, and a black apron ; a coarse apron being pinned round her. Mrs. Quale was an inveterate busy-body, knew every incident that took place in Daffodil's Delight, and possessed a free and easy tongue ; but she was a kindly woman withal, and very popular. She put her head outside the window above the geraniums, to reconnoitre.

"Oh, they be going, sure enough ! Well, they are fools ! That's just like Slippery Sam ! By to-morrow they won't have a threepenny piece to bless themselves with. But, if they must have went, they might have started earlier in the day. There's the Whites ! And—why !—there's the Dunns ! The van won't hold 'em all. As for the Dunns, they'll have to pinch for a month after it. She has got on a dandy new bonnet with pink ribbons. Aren't some folks idiots, Peter ? "

Peter rejoined, with a sort of a grunt, that

it wasn't no business of his, and applied himself again to his pipe and book. Mrs. Quale made everybody's business hers, especially their failings and short-comings ; and she unpinned the coarse apron, flung it aside, and flew off to the next house.

It was inhabited by two families, the Shucks and the Baxendales. Samuel Shuck, usually called Slippery Sam, was an idle, oily-tongued chap, always slipping from work—hence the nickname—and spending at the “Bricklayers' Arms” what ought to have been spent upon his wife and children. John Baxendale was a quiet, reserved man, living respectably with his wife and daughter, but not saving. It was singular how improvident most of them were. Daffodil's Delight was chiefly inhabited by the workmen of the Messrs. Hunter ; they seemed to love to congregate there as in a nest. Some of the houses were crowded with them, a family on a floor—even in a room ; others rented a house to themselves, and lived in comfort.

Assembled inside Sam Shuck's front room,

which was a kitchen and not a parlour, and to which the house door opened, were as many people as it could well hold, all in their holiday attire. Abel White, his wife and family ; Jim Dunn, and his ; Patrick Ryan and the childer, (Pat's wife was dead) ; and John Baxendale and his daughter, besides others ; the whole host of little Shucks, and half-a-dozen outside stragglers. Mrs. Quale might well wonder how all the lot could be stuffed into the pleasure van. She darted into their midst.

" You never mean to say you be a going off, like simpletons, at this time o' day ? " quoth she.

" Yes, we be," answered Sam Shuck, a lanky, serpent sort of man in frame, with a prominent black-eye, a turned-up nose, and, as has been said, an oily tongue. " What have you got to say again it, Mrs. Quale ? Come ! "

" Say ! " said that lady, undauntedly, but in a tone of reason rather than rebuke, " I say you may just as well fling your money in the gutter, as to go off to Epping at three

o'clock in the afternoon. Why didn't you start in the morning ? If I hired a pleasure-van, I'd have my money's worth out of it."

"It's just this here," said Sam. "It was ordered to be here as St. Paul's great bell was a striking break o' day, but the wheels wasn't greased ; and they have been all this time a greasing 'em with the best fresh butter at eighteen pence a pound, had up from Devonshire on purpose."

"You hold your tongue, Sam," reprimanded Mrs. Quale. "You have been a greasing your throat pretty strong, I see, with an extra pot or two ; you'll be in for it as usual before the day's out. How is it you are going now?" she added, turning to the women.

"It's just the worst managed thing as I ever had to do with," volubly spoke up Jim Dunn's wife, Hannah. "And it's all the fault o' the men : as everything as goes wrong always is. There was a quarrel yesterday over it, and nothing was settled, and this morning when we met, they began a jawing again. Some would go, and some

wouldn't ; some 'ud have a van to the Forest, and some 'ud take a omnibus ride up to the Zoological Gardens, and see the beasts, and finish up at the play ; some 'ud sit at home, and smoke, and drink, and wouldn't go nowhere ; and most of the men got off to the 'Bricklayers' Arms' and stuck there ; and afore the difference was settled in favour of the van and the Forest, twelve o'clock struck, and then there was dinner to be had, and us to put ourselves to rights and the van to be seen after. And there it is, now three o'clock's gone."

" It'll be just a ride out, and a ride in," cried Mrs. Quale ; " you won't have much time to stop. Money must be plentiful with you, a fooling it away like that. I thought some of you had better sense."

" We spoke against it, father and I," said quiet Mary Baxendale, in Mrs. Quale's ear ; " but as we had given our word to join in it and share in the expense, we didn't like to go from it again. Mother doesn't feel strong to-day, so she's stopping at home."

" It does seem stupid to start at this late

hour," spoke up a comely woman, mild in speech, Robert Darby's wife. "Better to have put it off till to-morrow, and taken another day's holiday, as I told my master. But when it was decided to go, we didn't say nay, for I couldn't bear to disappoint the children."

The children were already being lifted into the van. Sundry baskets and bundles, containing provisions for tea, and stone bottles of porter for the men, were being lifted in also. Then the general company got in ; Daffodil's Delight, those not bound on the expedition, assembling to witness the ceremony, and Peter casting an eye at it from his parlour. After much packing, and stowing, and laughing, and jesting, and the gentlemen declaring the ladies must sit upon their laps three deep, the van and its four horses moved off, and went lumbering down Daffodil's Delight.

Mrs. Quale, after watching the last of it, was turning into her own gate, when she heard a tapping at the window of the tenement on the *other* side of her house. Upon

looking round, it was thrown open, and a portly matron, dressed almost well enough for a lady, put out her head. She was the wife of George Stevens, a very well-to-do workman, and most respectable man.

"Are they going off to the Forest at this hour, that lot?"

"Ay," returned Mrs. Quale; "was ever such nonsense known? I'd have made a day of it, if I had went. They'll get home at midnight, I expect, fit to stand on their heads. Some of the men have had a'most as much as is good for them now."

"I say," continued Mrs. Stevens, "George says, will you and your master come in for an hour or two this evening, and eat a bit of supper with us? We shall have a nice dish o' beef steaks and onions, or some relishing thing of that sort, and the Cheeks are coming."

"Thank ye," said Mrs. Quale. "I'll ask Peter. But don't go and get anything hot."

"I must," was the answer. "We had a shoulder of lamb yesterday, and we finished

it up to-day for dinner, with a salad ; so there's nothing cold in the house, and I'm forced to cook a bit of something. I say, don't make it late ; come at six. George—he's off somewhere, but he'll be in."

Mrs. Quale nodded acquiescence, and went indoors. Her husband was reading and smoking still.

"I'd have put it off till ten at night, and went then !" ironically cried she, in allusion to the departed pleasure-party. "A bickering and contending they have been over it, Hannah Dunn says ; couldn't come to an agreement what they'd do, or what they wouldn't do ! Did you ever see such a load ! Them poor horses 'll have enough of it, if the others don't. I say, the Stevenses want us to go in there to supper to-night. Beef steaks and onions."

Peter's head was bent attentively over a map in his book, and it continued so bent for a minute or two. Then he raised it.  
"Who's to be there ?"

"The Cheeks," she said. "I'll make haste and put the kettle on, and we'll have our

tea as soon as it boils. She says don't go in later than six."

Pinning on the coarse apron, Mrs. Quale passed into the kitchen to her work. From the above slight sketch, it may be gathered that Daffodil's Delight was, take it for all in all, in tolerably comfortable circumstances. But for the wasteful mode of living generally pervading it; the improvidence both of husbands and wives; the spending where they need not have spent, and in things they would have been better without—it would have been in *very* comfortable circumstances: for, as is well known, no class of operatives earn better wages than those connected with the building trade.

"Is this Peter Quale's?"

The question proceeded from a stranger, who had entered the house passage, and thence the parlour, after knocking at its door. Peter raised his eyes, and beheld a tall, young, very gentlemanlike man, in grey travelling clothes and a crape band on his black hat. Of courteous manners also, for he lifted his hat as he spoke, though Peter

was only a workman and had a paper cap on his head.

"I am Peter Quale," said Peter, without moving.

Perhaps you may have already guessed that it was Austin Clay. He stepped forward with a frank smile. "I am sent here," he said, "by the Messrs. Hunter. They desired me to inquire for Peter Quale."

Peter was not wont to put himself out of the way for strangers: had a Duke Royal vouchsafed him a visit, I question if Peter would have been more than barely civil; but he knew his place with respect to his employers, and what was due to them—none better; and he rose up at their name, and took off his paper cap, and laid his pipe inside the fender, and spoke a word of apology to the gentleman before him.

"Pray do not mention it; do not disturb yourself," said Austin, kindly. "My name is Clay. I have just entered into an engagement with the Messrs. Hunter, and am now in search of lodgings as conveniently near their yard as may be. Mr. Henry Hunter

said he thought you had rooms which might suit me : hence my intrusion."

" Well, sir, I don't know," returned Peter, rather dubiously. He was one of those who are apt to grow bewildered with any sudden proposition ; requiring time, as may be said, to take it in, before he could digest it.

" You are from the country, sir, may be ?"

" I am from the country. I arrived in London but an hour ago, and my portmanteau is yet at the station. I wish to settle where I shall lodge, before I go to get it. Have you rooms to let ?"

" Here, Nancy, come in !" cried Peter to his wife. " The rooms are in readiness to be shown, aren't they ?"

Mrs. Quale required no second call. Hearing a strange voice, and gifted in a remarkable degree with what we are taught to look upon as her sex's failing—curiosity—she had already discarded again the apron, and made her appearance in time to receive the question.

" Ready and waiting," answered she. " And two better rooms for their size, you

won't find, sir, search London through," she said volubly, turning to Austin. "They are on the first floor—a nice sitting-room, and a bedchamber behind it. The furniture is good, and clean, and handsome; for, when we were buying of it, we didn't spare a few pounds, knowing such would keep good to the end. Would you please step up, sir, and take a look at them?"

Austin acquiesced, motioning to her to lead the way. She dropped a curtsey as she passed him, as if in apology for taking it. He followed, and Peter brought up the rear, a dim notion penetrating Peter's brain that the attention was due from him to one sent by the Messrs. Hunter.

Two good rooms, as she had said; small, but well fitted up. "You'd be sure to be comfortable, sir," cried Mrs. Quale to Austin. "If *I* can't make lodgers comfortable, I don't know who can. Our last gentleman came to us three years ago, and left but a month since. He was a barrister's clerk, but he didn't get well paid, and he lodged in this part for cheapness."

"The rooms would suit me, so far as I can judge," said Austin, looking round ; "suit me very well indeed, if we can agree upon terms. My pocket is but a shallow one at present," he laughed.

"I would make *them* easy enough for any gentleman sent by the masters," struck in Peter. "Did you say your name was Clay, sir?"

"Clay," assented Austin.

Mrs. Quale wheeled round at this, and took a free, full view of the gentleman from head to foot. "Clay ? Clay ?" she repeated to herself. "And there *is* a likeness, if ever I saw one ! Sir," she hastily inquired, "do you come from the neighbourhood of Ketterford ?"

"I come from Ketterford itself," replied he.

"Ah, but you were not born right in the town. I think you must be Austin Clay, sir ; the orphan son of Mr. Clay and his wife—Miss Austin that used to be. They lived at the Nash farm. Sir, I have had you upon my lap scores of times when you were a little one."

"Why—— who are you?" exclaimed Austin.

"You can't have forgot old Mr. Austin, the great-uncle, sir? though you were only seven years old when he died. I was Ann Best, cook to the old gentleman, and I heard all the inns and outs of the marriage of your father and mother. The match pleased neither family, and so they just took the Nash farm for themselves, to be independent and get along without being beholden for help to anybody. Many a fruit puff have I made for you, Master Austin; many a currant cake: how things come round in this world! Do take our rooms, sir—it will seem like serving my old master over again."

"I will take them willingly, and be glad to fall into such good hands. You will not require references now?"

Mrs. Quale laughed. Peter grunted resentfully. References from anybody sent by the Messrs. Hunter! "I would say eight shillings a week, sir," said Peter, looking at his wife "Pay as you like; monthly, or quarterly, or any way."

"That's less than I expected," said Austin, in his candour. "Mr. Henry Hunter thought they would be about ten shillings."

Peter was candid also. "There's the neighbourhood to be took into consideration, sir, which is not a good one, and we can only let according to it. In some parts—and not far off, neither—you'd pay eighteen or twenty shillings for such rooms as these; in Daffodil's Delight it is different, though this is the best quarter of it. The last gentleman paid us nine. If eight will suit you, sir, it will suit us."

So the bargain was struck; and Austin Clay went back to the station for his luggage. Mrs. Quale, busy as a bee, ran in to tell her next door neighbour that she could not be one of the beefsteak-and-onion eaters that night, though Peter might, for she should have her hands full with their new lodger. "The nicest, handsomest young fellow," she wound up with; "one it will be a pleasure to wait on."

"Take care what you be at, if he's a stranger," cried cautious Mrs. Stevens.

"There's no trusting those country folks : they run away sometimes. It looks odd, don't it, to come after lodgings one minute, and enter upon 'em the next ?"

"Very odd," assented Mrs. Quale, with a laugh. "Why, it was Mr. Henry Hunter sent him round here ; and he has got a post in their house."

"What sort of one ?" asked Mrs. Stevens, sceptical still.

"Who knows ? Something superior to the best of us workpeople, you may be sure. He belongs to gentlefolks," concluded Mrs. Quale. "I knew him as a baby. It was in his mother's family I lived before I married. He's as like his mother as two peas, and a handsome woman was Mrs. Clay. Good-bye : I'm going to get the sheets on to his bed now."

Mrs. Quale, however, found that she was, after all, able to assist at the supper ; for, when Austin came back, it was only to dress himself and go out, in pursuance of the invitation he had accepted to dine at Mr. Henry Hunter's. With all his haste it had

struck six some minutes when he got there.

Mrs. Henry Hunter, a very pretty and very talkative woman, welcomed him with both hands, and told her children to do the same, for it was "the gentleman who saved papa." There was no ceremony ; he was received quite *en famille* ; no other guest was present, and three or four of the children dined at table. He appeared to find favour with them all. He talked on business matters with Mr. Henry Hunter ; on lighter topics with his wife ; he pointed out some errors in Mary Hunter's drawings, which she somewhat ostentatiously exhibited to him, and showed her how to rectify them. He entered into the school life of the two young boys, from their classics to their scrapes ; and nursed a pretty little lady of five, who insisted on appropriating his knee—bearing himself throughout all with the modest reticence—the refinement of the innate gentleman. Mrs. Henry Hunter was charmed with him.

"How do you think you shall like your

quarters?" she asked. "Mr. Hunter told me he recommended you to Peter Quale's."

"Very well. At least they will do. Mrs. Quale, it appears, is an old friend of mine."

"An old friend! Of yours!"

"She claims me as one, and says she has nursed me many a time when I was a child. I had quite forgotten her, and all about her, though I now remember her name. She was formerly a servant in my mother's family, near Ketterford."

Thus Austin Clay had succeeded without delay or difficulty in obtaining employment, and was, moreover, received on a footing of equality in the house of Mr. Henry Hunter. We shall see how he gets on.

## CHAPTER V.

### MISS GWINN'S VISIT.

WERE there space, it might be well to trace Austin Clay's progress step by step—his advancements and his drawbacks—his smooth-sailing and his difficulties; for, that his course was not free from difficulties and drawbacks, you may be very sure. I do not know whose is. If any had thought he was to be represented as perfection, they were mistaken. Yet he managed to hold on his way without moral damage, for he was high-principled in every sense of the word. But there is neither time nor space to give to these particulars that regard himself alone.

Austin Clay sat one day in a small room of the office, making corrections in a certain plan, which had been roughly sketched. It was a hot day for the beginning of autumn

"Will you shut the door?" she said, in a peremptory, short tone, for the boy had left it open.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Gwinn," interrupted Austin, necessity giving him courage. "Though glad to see you myself, I am at the present hour so busy that it is next to impossible for me to give you my attention. If you will name any place where I can wait upon you after business hours, this, or any other evening, I shall be happy to meet you."

Miss Gwinn ranged her eyes round the room, looking, possibly, for confirmation of his words. "You are not so busy as to be unable to spare a minute to me. You were but looking over a plan."

"It is a plan that is being waited for." Which was true. "And you must forgive me for reminding you—I do it in all courtesy—that my time and this room do not belong to me, but to my employers."

"Boy! what is your motive for seeking to get rid of me?" she asked, abruptly. "That you have one, I can see."

Austin was upon thorns. He had not taken a seat. He stood near the door, pencil in hand, hoping it would induce her to move. At that moment footsteps were heard, and the office-door was pushed wide open.

It was Mr. Hunter. He stopped on the threshold, seeing a lady, an unusual sight there, and came to the conclusion that it must be some stranger for Mr. Clay. Her features, shaded by the thick white veil, were indistinct, and Mr. Hunter but glanced at her. Miss Gwinn on the contrary looked full at him, as she did at most people, and bent her head as a slight mark of courtesy. He responded by lifting his hat, and went out again.

"One of the principals, I suppose ?" she remarked.

"Yes," he replied, feeling thankful that it was not Mr. Henry. "I believe he wants me, Miss Gwinn."

"I am not going to keep you from him. The question I wish to put to you will be answered in a sentence. Austin Clay, have you, since——"

"Allow me one single instant first, then," interrupted Austin, resigning himself to his fate, "just to speak a word of explanation to Mr. Hunter."

He stepped out of the room and closed the door behind him. Standing at the outer door, close by, open to the yard, was Mr. Hunter. Austin, in his haste and earnestness, grasped his arm.

"Find Mr. Henry, sir," he whispered. "Wherever he may be, let him keep there—out of sight—until she—this person—has gone. It is Miss Gwinn."

"Who? What do you say?" cried Mr. Hunter, staring at Austin.

"It is that Miss Gwinn. The woman who set upon Mr. Henry in that strange manner. She—"

Miss Gwinn opened the door at this juncture, and looked out upon them. Mr. Hunter walked briskly away in search of his brother. Austin turned back again.

She closed the door when he was inside the room, keeping her hand upon it. She

did not sit down, but stood facing Austin, whom she held before her with the other hand.

"Have you, since you came to London, seen ought of my enemy?—that man whom you saved from his death in the gravel pits? Boy! answer me truthfully."

He remained silent, scarcely seeing what his course ought to be; or whether in such a case a lie of denial might not be justifiable. But the hesitation spoiled that, for she read it arightly.

"No need of your affirmative," she said. "I see you have met him. Where is he to be found?"

There was only one course for him now; and he took it, in all straightforward openness.

"It is true I have seen that gentleman, Miss Gwinn, but I can tell you nothing about him."

She looked fixedly at him. "That you cannot, or that you will not? Which?"

"That I will not. Forgive the seeming incivility of the avowal, but I consider that

I ought not to comply with your request—that I should be doing wrong."

"Explain. What do you mean by 'wrong?'"

"In the first place, I believe you were mistaken with regard to the gentleman: I do not think he was the one for whom you took him. In the second place, even if he be the one, I cannot make it my business to bring you into contact with him, and so give rise—as it probably would—to further violence."

There was a pause. She threw up her veil and looked fixedly at him, struggling for composure, her lips compressed, her face working.

"You know who he is, and where he lives," she jerked forth.

"I acknowledge that."

"How dare you take part against me?" she cried, in agitation.

"I do not take part against you, Miss Gwinn," he replied, wishing some friendly balloon would come and whirl her away; for Mr. Hunter might not find his brother to

give the warning. "I do not take his part more than I take yours, only in so far as that I decline to tell you who and where he is. Had he the same ill-feeling towards you, and wished to know where you might be found, I would not tell him."

"Austin Clay, you *shall* tell me."

He drew himself up to his full height, speaking in all the quiet consciousness of resolution. "Never, of my own free will. And I think, Miss Gwinn, there are no means by which you can compel me."

"Perhaps the law might?" She spoke dreamily, not in answer to him, but in commune with herself, as if debating the question. "Fare you well for the present, young man; but I have not done with you."

To his intense satisfaction she turned out of the office, catching up the flowers as she went. Austin attended her to the outer gate. She strode straight on, not deigning to cast a glance to the busy yard, with its sheds, its timber, its implements of work, and its artisans, all scattered about it.

"Believe me," he said, holding out his

hand as a peace offering, "I am not willingly discourteous. I wish I could see my way clear to help you."

She did not take the hand ; she walked away without another word or look, and Austin went back again. Mr. Hunter advanced to meet him from the upper end of the yard, and went with him into the small room.

"What was all that, Clay ? I scarcely understood."

"I dare say not, sir, for I had no time to be explanatory. It seems she—Miss Gwinn—has come to town on business. She procured my address from Mrs. Thornimett, and came here to ask of me if I had seen anything of her enemy—meaning Mr. Henry Hunter. I feared lest he should be coming in ; I could only beg of you to find Mr. Henry, and warn him not. That is all, sir."

Mr. Hunter stood with his back to Austin, softly whistling—his habit when in deep thought. "What can be her motive for wanting to find him ?" he presently said.

"She speaks of revenge. Of course I do not know for what: I cannot give a guess. There's no doubt she is mistaken in the person, when she accuses Mr. Henry Hunter."

"Well," returned Mr. Hunter, "I said nothing to my brother, for I did not understand what there was to say. It will be better not to tell him now; the woman is gone, and the subject does not appear to be a pleasant one. Do you hear?"

"Very well, sir."

"I think I understood, when the affair was spoken of some time ago, that she does not know him as Mr. Hunter?"

"Of course she does not," said Austin. "She would have been here after him before now if she did. She came this morning to see me, not suspecting she might meet him."

"Ah! Better keep the visit close," cried Mr. Hunter, as he walked away.

Now, it had occurred to Austin that it would be better to do just the opposite thing. *He* should have told Mr. Henry Hunter, and left that gentleman to seek out Miss Gwinn,

or not, as he might choose. A sudden meeting between them in the office, in the hearing of the yard, and with the lady in excitement, was not desirable ; but, that Mr. Henry Hunter should clear himself, now that she was following him up, and convince her it was not he who was the suspected party, was, Austin thought, needful : that is, if he could do it. However, he could only obey Mr. Hunter's suggestions.

Austin resumed his occupation. His brain and fingers were busy over the plan, when he saw a gig drive into the yard. It contained the great engineer, Sir Michael Wilson. Mr. Henry Hunter came down the yard to meet him ; they shook hands, and entered the private room together. In a few minutes Mr. Henry came to Austin.

“Are you particularly engaged, Clay ?”

“Only with this plan, sir. It is wanted as soon as I can get it done.”

“You can leave it for a quarter of an hour. I wish you to go round to Dr. Bevary. I was to have been at his house now—half-past eleven—to accompany him on a visit to

a sick friend. Tell him that Sir Michael has come, and I have to go out with him, therefore it is impossible for me to keep my engagement. I am very sorry, tell Bevary : these things always happen crossly. Go right into his consulting-room, Clay ; never mind patients ; or else he will be chafing at my delay, and grumble the ceiling off."

Austin departed. Dr. Bevary occupied a good house in the main street, to the left of the yard, to gain which he had to pass the turning to Daffodil's Delight. Had Dr. Bevary lived to the right of the yard, his practice might have been more exclusive ; but doctors cannot always choose their localities, circumstances more frequently doing that for them. He had a large connection, and was often pressed for time.

Down went Austin, and gained the house. Just inside the open door, before which a close carriage was standing, was the doctor's servant.

" Doctor Bevary is engaged, sir, with a lady patient," said the man. " He is

very particularly engaged for the moment, but I don't think he'll be long."

"I'll wait," said Austin, not deeming it well strictly to follow Mr. Henry Hunter's directions ; and he turned, without ceremony, to the little box of a study on the left of the hall.

"Not there, sir," interposed the man hastily, and he showed him into the drawing-room on the right ; Dr. Bevary and his patient being in the consulting-room.

Ten minutes of impatience to Austin. What could any lady mean by keeping him so long, in his own house ? Then they came forth. The lady, a very red and portly one, rather old, was pushed into her carriage by the help of her footman, Austin watching the process from the window. The carriage then drove off.

The doctor did not come in. Austin concluded the servant must have forgotten to tell him he was there. He crossed the hall to the little study, the doctor's private room, knocked and entered.

"I am not to care for patients," called

out he gaily, believing the doctor was alone ; “Mr. Henry Hunter says so.” But, to his surprise, a patient was sitting there—at least, a lady ; sitting, nose and knees together, with Dr. Bevary, and talking hurriedly and earnestly, as if they had the whole weight of the nation’s affairs on their shoulders.

It was Miss Gwinn. The flowers had apparently found their home, for they were in a vase on the table. Austin took it all in at a glance.

“So it is you, is it, Austin Clay !” she exclaimed. “I was acquainting Dr. Bevary with your refusal to give me that man’s address, and asking his opinion whether the law could compel you. Have you come after me to say you have thought better of it ?”

Austin was decidedly taken aback. It might have been his fancy, but he thought he saw a look of caution go out to him from Dr. Bevary’s eyes.

“Was your visit to this lady, Mr. Clay ?”

“No, sir, it was to you. Sir Michael

Wilson has come down on business, and Mr. Henry Hunter will not be able to keep his appointment with you. He desired me to say that he was sorry, but that it was no fault of his."

Dr. Bevary nodded. "Tell him I was about to send round to say that I could not keep mine with him, so it's all right. Another day will—"

A sharp cry. A cry of passion, of rage, almost of terror. It came from Miss Gwinn; and the doctor, breaking off his sentence, turned to her in amazement.

It was well he did so; it was well he caught her hands. Another moment, and she would have dashed them through the window, and perhaps herself also. Driving by, in the gig, were Sir Michael Wilson and Mr. Henry Hunter. It was at the latter she gazed, at him she pointed.

"Do you see him? Do you see him?" she panted to the doctor. "That's the man; not the one driving; the other—the one sitting this way. Oh, Dr. Bevary, will you believe me now? I told you I met him

at Ketterford ; and there he is again ! Let me go ! ”

She was strong almost as a wild animal, wrestling with the doctor to get from him. He made a motion to Austin to keep the door, and there ensued a sharp struggle. Dr. Bevary got her into an arm-chair at last, and stood before her, holding her hands, at first in silence. Then he spoke calmly, soothingly, as he would to a child.

“ My dear lady, what will become of you if you give way to these fits of violence ? But for me, I really believe you would have been through the window. A pretty affair of spikes that would be ! I should have had you laid up in my house for a month, covered over with sticking-plaster.”

“ If you had not stopped me I might have caught that gig,” was her passionate rejoinder.

“ Caught that gig ! A gig going at the rate of ten miles an hour, if it was going one ! By the time you had got down the steps of my door it would have been out of

sight. How people can drive at that random rate in London streets, *I* can't think."

"How can I find him? How can I find him?"

Her tone was quite a wail of anguish. However they might deprecate her mistaken violence, it was impossible but that both her hearers should feel compassion for her. She laid her hand on the doctor's arm.

"Will you not help me to find him, Dr. Bevary? Did you note him?"

"So far as to see that there were two persons in the gig, and that they were men, not women. Do you feel sure it was the man you speak of? It is so easy to be mistaken in a person who is being whirled along swiftly."

"Mistaken!" she returned, in a strangely significant tone. "Dr. Bevary, I am sure it was he. I have not kept him in my mind for years, to mistake him now. Austin Clay," she fiercely added, turning round upon Austin, "*you* speak; speak the truth: I saw you look after them. Was it, or was it not, the man whom I met at Ketterford?"

"I believe it was," was Austin's answer. "Nevertheless, Miss Gwinn, I do not believe him to be the enemy you spoke of—the one who worked you ill. He denies it just as solemnly as you assert it; and I am sure he is a truthful man."

"And that I am a liar?"

"No. That you believe what you assert, is only too apparent. I think it a case, on your side, of mistaken identity."

Happening to raise his eyes, Austin caught those of Dr. Bevary fixed upon him with a keen, troubled, earnest gaze. It asked, as plainly as a gaze could ask, "*Do you believe so? or is the falsehood on his side?*"

"Will you disclose to Dr. Bevary the name of that man, if you will not to me?"

Again the gentlemen's eyes met, and this time an unmistakeable warning of caution gleamed forth from Dr. Bevary's. Austin could only obey it.

"I must decline to speak of him in any way, Miss Gwinn," said he; "you had my reasons before. Dr. Bevary, I have given

you the message I was charged with. I must wish you both good day."

Austin walked back, full of thought, his belief somewhat wavering. "It is very strange," he reflected. "Could a woman, could any one be so positive as she is, unless thoroughly sure? What *is* the mystery, I wonder? That it was no sentimental affair between them, or rubbish of that sort, is patent by the difference of their ages; she looks pretty nearly old enough to be his mother. Mr. Henry Hunter's is a remarkable face—one that would alter little in a score of years."

The bell was ringing twelve as he approached the yard, and the workmen were pouring out of it, on their way home to dinner. Plentiful tables awaited them; little care was on their minds; flourishing was every branch of the building trade then. Peter Quale came up to Austin.

"Sam Shuck have just been up here, sir, a-eating humble pie, and praying to be took on again. But the masters be both absent; and Mr. Mills, he said he didn't choose, in a

thing like this, to act on his own responsibility, for he heard Mr. Hunter say Shuck shouldn't again be employed."

"I would not take him on," replied Austin, "if it rested with me. An idle, skulking, deceitful vagabond, drunk and incapable at one time, striving to spread discontent among the men at another. He has been on the loose for a fortnight now. But it is not my affair, Quale; Mr. Mills is manager."

The yard, between twelve and one, was pretty nearly deserted. The gentleman, spoken of as Mr. Mills, and Austin, usually remained; the principals would sometimes be there, and an odd man or two. The timekeeper lived in the yard. Austin rather liked that hour; it was quiet. He was applying to his plan with a zest, when another interruption came, in the shape of Dr. Bevary. Austin began to think he might as well put the drawing away altogether.

"Anybody in the offices, Mr. Clay, except you?" asked the doctor.

"Not indoors. Mills is about somewhere."

Down sat the doctor, and fixed his keen

eyes upon Austin. "What took place here this morning with Miss Gwinn ?"

"No harm, sir," replied Austin, briefly explaining. "As it happened, Mr. Henry kept away. Mr. Hunter came in and saw her ; but that was all."

"What is your opinion ?" abruptly asked the doctor. "Come, give it freely. You have your share of judgment, and of discretion too, or I should not ask it. Is she mistaken, or is Henry Hunter false ?"

Austin did not immediately reply. Dr. Bevary mistook the cause of his silence.

"Don't hesitate, Clay. You know I am trustworthy ; and it is not I who would stir to harm a Hunter. If I seek to come to the bottom of this affair, it is that I may do what I can to repair damage ; to avert some of the fruits of wrong-doing."

"If I hesitated, Dr. Bevary, it was that I really am at a loss what answer to give. When Mr. Henry Hunter denies that he knows the woman, or that he ever has known her, he appears to me to speak open truth. On the other hand, these recognitions of Miss

Gwinn's, and her persistency, are, to say the least of them, suspicious and singular. Until within an hour I had full trust in Mr. Henry Hunter ; now I do not know what to think. She seemed to recognise him in the gig so surely."

" He does not appear"—Dr. Bevary appeared to be speaking to himself, and his head was bent—" like one who carries about with him some dark secret."

" Mr. Henry Hunter ? None less. Never a man whose outside gave indications of a clearer conscience. But, Dr. Bevary, if her enemy be Mr. Henry Hunter, how is it she does not know him by name ? "

" Ay, there's another point. She evidently attaches no importance to the name of Hunter."

" What was the name of—of the enemy she talks of ? " asked Austin. " We must call him ' enemy ' for want of a better name. Do you know it, doctor ? "

" No. Can't get it out of her. Never could get it out of her. I asked her again to-day, but she evaded the question."

"Mr. Hunter thought it would be better to keep her visit this morning a secret from his brother, as they had not met. I, on the contrary, should have told him of it."

"No," hastily interposed Dr. Bevary, putting up his hand with an alarmed, warning gesture. "The only way is, to keep her and Henry Hunter apart."

"I wonder," mused Austin, "what brings her to town?"

The doctor threw his penetrating gaze into Austin's eyes. "Have you no idea what it is?"

"None, sir. She seemed to intimate that she came every year."

"Good. Don't try to form any, my young friend. It would not be a pleasant secret, even for you to hold!"

He rose as he spoke, nodded, and went out, leaving Austin Clay in a state of puzzled bewilderment. It was not lessened when, an hour later, Austin encountered Dr. Bevary's close carriage, driving rapidly along the street, the doctor seated inside it, and Miss Gwinn beside him.

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## CHAPTER VI.

### TRACKED HOME.

I THINK it has been mentioned that the house next door to the Quales', detached from it, however, was inhabited by two families. The lower part by Mr. Samuel Shuck, his wife and children ; the upper and best part by the Baxendales. No two sets of people could be more dissimilar ; the one being as respectable as the other was disreputable. John Baxendale's wife was an invalid ; she had been so, on and off, for a long while. There was an only daughter, and she and her mother held themselves very much aloof from the general society of Daffodil's Delight.

On the morning following the day spoken of in the last chapter, as distinguished by the advent of Miss Gwinn in London, Mrs.

Baxendale found herself considerably worse than usual. Mr. Rice, the apothecary, who was the general attendant in Daffodil's Delight, and lived at its corner, had given her medicine, and told her to "eat well and get up her strength." But, somehow, the strength and the appetite did not come ; on the contrary, she got weaker and weaker. She was in very bad spirits this morning, was quite unable to get up, and cried for some time in silence.

"Mother, dear," said Mary Baxendale, going into her room, "you'll have the doctor gone out, I fear."

"Oh, Mary ! I cannot get up—I cannot go," was the answer, delivered with a burst of sobbing sorrow. "I shall never rise from my bed again."

The words fell on the daughter with a terrible shock. Her fears in regard to her mother's health had long been excited, but this seemed like a confirmation of a result she had never dared openly to face. She was not a very capable sort of girl—the reverse of what is called strong-minded ;

but the instinct imparted by all true affection, warned her to make light of her mother's words.

"Nay, mother, it's not so bad as that," she said, checking her tears. "You'll get up again fast enough. You are feeling low, maybe, this morning."

"Child, I am too weak to get up—too ill. I don't think I shall ever be about again."

Mary sat down in a sort of helpless perplexity.

"What is to be done?" she cried.

Mrs. Baxendale asked herself the same question as she lay. Finding herself no better under Mr. Rice's treatment, she had at length determined to do what she ought to have done at first—consult Dr. Bevary.

From half-past eight to ten, three mornings in the week, Dr. Bevary gave advice gratis; and Mrs. Baxendale was on this one to have gone to him—rather a formidable visit, as it seemed to her, and perhaps the very thought of it had helped to make her worse.

"What is to be done?" repeated Mary.

"Could you not wait upon him, child, and describe my symptoms?" suggested the sick woman, after weighing the dilemma in her mind. "It might do as well. Perhaps he can write for me."

"Oh, mother, I don't like to go!" exclaimed Mary, in the impulse of the moment.

"But, my dear, what else is to be done?" urged Mrs. Baxendale. "We can't ask a great gentleman like that to come to me."

"To be sure—true. Oh, yes, I'll go, mother."

Mary got herself ready without another word. Mrs. Baxendale, a superior woman for her station in life, had brought up her daughter to be thoroughly dutiful. It had seemed a formidable task to the mother, the going to this physician, this "great gentleman;" it seemed a far worse to the daughter, and especially the having to explain symptoms and ailments at second-hand. But the great physician was a very pleasant man, and would nod good-humouredly to Mary, when by chance he met her in the street.

"Tell him, with my duty, that I am not equal to coming myself," said Mrs. Baxendale, when Mary stood ready in her neat straw bonnet and light shawl. "I ought to have gone weeks ago, and that's the truth. Don't forget to describe the pain in my right side, and the flushings of heat."

So Mary went on her way, and was admitted to the presence of Dr. Bevary, where she told her tale with awkward timidity.

"Ah! a return of the old weakness that she had years ago," remarked the doctor. "I told her she must be careful. Too ill to get up? Why did she not come to me before?"

"I suppose, sir, she did not much like to trouble you," responded Mary. "She has been hoping from week to week that Mr. Rice would do her good."

"*I* can't do her good, unless I see her," cried the doctor. "I might prescribe just the wrong thing, you know."

Mary repressed her tears.

"I am afraid, then, she must die, sir.

She said this morning she thought she should never get up from her bed again."

"I'll step round some time to-day and see her," said Dr. Bevary. "But now, don't you go chattering that to the whole parish. I should have every sick person in it expecting me, as a right, to call and visit them."

He laughed pleasantly at Mary as he spoke, and she departed with a glad heart. The visit had been so much less formidable in reality than anticipation.

As she reached Daffodil's Delight, she did not turn into it, but continued her way to the house of Mrs. Hunter. Mary Baxendale took in plain sewing, and had some in hand at present from that lady. She inquired for Dobson. Dobson was Mrs. Hunter's own maid, and a very consequential one.

"Not able to get Miss Hunter's night-dresses home on Saturday!" grumbled Dobson, when she appeared and heard what Mary had to say. "But you must, Mary Baxendale. You promised them, you know."

"I should not have promised had I known that my mother would have grown worse," said Mary. "A sick person requires a deal of waiting on, and there's only me. I'll do what I can to get them home next week, if that will do."

"I don't know that it will do," snapped Dobson. "Miss Florence may be wanting them. A promise is a promise, Mary Baxendale."

"Yes, it will do, Mary," cried Florence Hunter, darting forward from some forbidden nook, whence she had heard the colloquy, and following Mary down the steps into the street. A fair sight was that child to look upon, with her white muslin dress, her blue ribbons, her flowing hair, and her sweet countenance, radiant as a summer's morning. "Mamma is not down-stairs yet, or I would ask her,—she is ill too,—but I know I do not want them. Never you mind them, and never mind Dobson either, but nurse your mother."

Dobson drew the young lady back, asking her if such behaviour was not enough to

"scandalise the square ;" and Mary Baxendale returned home.

Dr. Bevary paid his visit to Mrs. Baxendale about mid-day. His practised eye saw with certainty what others were only beginning to suspect—that Death had marked her. He wrote a prescription, gave some general directions, said he would call again, and told Mrs. Baxendale she would be better out of bed than in it.

Accordingly, after his departure, she got up and went into the front room, which they made their sitting-room. But the exertion caused her to faint ; she was certainly on this day much worse than usual. John Baxendale was terribly concerned, and did not go back to his work after dinner. When the bustle was over, and she seemed pretty comfortable again, somebody burst into the room, without knocking or other ceremony. It was one of the Shucks, a young man of eight, in tattered clothes, and a shock head of hair. He came to announce that Mrs. Hunter's maid was asking for Mary, and little Miss Hunter was there too,

and said, might she come up and see Mrs. Baxendale.

Both were requested to walk up. Dobson had brought a gracious message from her mistress (not graciously delivered, though), that the sewing might wait till it was quite convenient to do it; and Florence produced a jar, which she had insisted upon carrying herself, and had thereby split her grey kid gloves, it being too large for her hands.

"It is black currant jelly, Mrs. Baxendale," she said, with the prettiest, kindest air, as she freely sat down by the sick woman's side. "I asked mamma to let me bring some, for I remember when I was ill I only liked black currant jelly. Mamma is so sorry to hear you are worse, and she will come to see you soon."

"Bless your little heart, Miss Florence!" exclaimed the invalid. "The same dear child as ever—thinking of other people, and not of yourself."

"I have no need to think for myself," said Florence. "Everything I want is got ready for me. I wish you did not look so

ill. I wish you would have my uncle Bevary to see you. He cures everybody."

"He has been kind enough to come round to-day, miss," spoke up John Baxendale, "and he'll come again, he says. I hope he will be able to do the missis good. As you be a bit better," he added to his wife, "I think I'll go back to my work."

"Ay, do, John. There's no cause for you to stay at home. It was some sort of weakness, I suppose, that came over me."

John Baxendale touched his hair to Florence, nodded to Dobson, and went downstairs and out. Florence turned to the open window to watch his departure, ever restless, as a healthy child is apt to be.

"There's Uncle Henry!" she suddenly called out.

Mr. Henry Hunter was walking rapidly down Daffodil's Delight. He encountered John Baxendale as the man went out of his gate.

"Not back at work yet, Baxendale?"

"The missis has been taken worse, sir," was the man's reply. "She fainted dead off

just now, and I declare I didn't know what to think about her. She's all right again, and I am going round."

At that moment there was heard a tapping at the window panes, and a pretty little head was pushed out beneath them, nodding and laughing, "Uncle Henry! How do you do, Uncle Henry?"

Mr. Henry Hunter nodded in reply, and pursued his way, unconscious that the lynx eye of Miss Gwinn was following him, like a hawk watching its prey.

It happened that she had penetrated Daffodil's Delight, hoping to catch Austin Clay at his dinner, which she supposed he might be taking about that hour. She held his address at Peter Quale's from Mrs. Thornimett. Her object was to make a further effort to get from him what he knew of the man she sought to find. Scarcely had she turned into Daffodil's Delight, when she saw Mr. Henry Hunter at a distance. Away she tore after him, and gained upon him considerably. She reached the house of John Baxendale just as he, Baxendale, was re-

entering it ; for he had forgotten something he must take with him to the yard. Turning her head upon Baxendale for a minute as she passed, Miss Gwinn lost sight of Mr. Henry Hunter.

How had he disappeared ? Into the ground ? or into a house ? or down any obscure passage that might be a short cut between Daffodil's Delight and some other Delight ? or into that cab that was now whirling onwards at such a rate ? That he was no longer visible, was certain : and Miss Gwinn was exceeding wroth. She came to the conclusion that he had seen her, and hid himself in the cab, though she had not heard it stop.

But she had seen him spoken to from the window of that house, where the workman had just gone in, and she determined to make inquiries there, and so strode up the path. In the Shucks' kitchen there were only three or four children, too young to give an answer. Miss Gwinn picked her way through them, over the dirt and grease of the floor, and ascended to the sitting-room

above. She stood a minute to take in its view.

John Baxendale was on his knees, hunting among some tools at the bottom of a closet ; Mary was meekly exhibiting the progress of the nightgowns to Dobson, who sat in state, sour enough to turn milk into curd ; the invalid was lying, pale, in her chair ; while the young lady appeared to be assisting at the tool-hunting, on her knees also, and chattering as fast as her tongue could go. All looked up at the apparition of the stranger, who stood there gazing in upon them.

“Can you tell me where a gentleman of the name of Lewis lives ?” she began, in an indirect, diplomatic, pleasant sort of way, for she no doubt deemed it well to discard violence for tact. In the humour she was in yesterday, she would have said, sharply and imperiously, “Tell me the name of that man I saw now pass your gate.”

John Baxendale rose. “Lewis, ma’am ? I don’t know anybody of the name.”

A pause. “It is very unfortunate,” she

mildly resumed. "I am in search of the gentleman, and have not got his address. I believe he belongs to this neighbourhood. Indeed, I am almost sure I saw him talking to you just now at the gate—though my sight is none of the clearest from a distance. The same gentleman to whom that young lady nodded."

"That was my uncle Henry," called out the child.

"Who?" cried she, sharply.

"It was Mr. Henry Hunter, ma'am, that was," spoke up Baxendale.

"Mr. Henry Hunter!" she repeated, as she knit her brow on John Baxendale. "That gentleman is Mr. Lewis."

"No, that he is not," said John Baxendale. "I ought to know, ma'am; I have worked for him for some years."

Here the mischief might have ended; there's no telling; but that busy little tongue of all tongues—ah! what work they make!—began clapping again.

"Perhaps you mean my papa. Papa's name is Lewis—James Lewis Hunter. But

he is never called Mr. Lewis. He is brother to my uncle Henry."

A wild flush of crimson flashed over Miss Gwinn's sallow face. Something within her seemed to whisper that her search was over. "It is possible I mistook the one for the other in the distance," she observed, all her new diplomacy in full play. "Are they alike in person?" she continued to John Baxendale.

"Not so much alike now, ma'am. In years gone by they were the very model of one another; but Mr. Hunter has grown stout, and it has greatly altered him. Mr. Henry looks just like what Mr. Hunter used to look."

"And who are you, did you say?" she asked of Florence with an emphasis that would have been quite wild, but that it was in a degree suppressed. "You are not Mr. Lewis Hunter's daughter?"

"I am," said Miss Florence.

"And——you have a mother?"

"Of course I have," repeated the child.

A pause: the lady looked at John Baxen-

dale. "Then Mr. Lewis Hunter is a married man?"

"To be sure he is," said John, "ever so many years ago. Miss Florence is twelve."

"Thank you," said Miss Gwinn abruptly turning away. "Good morning."

She went down the stairs at a great rate, and did not stay to pick her steps over the grease of the Shucks' floor.

"What a mistake to make!" was her inward comment, and she laughed as she said it. "I did not sufficiently allow for the lapse of years. If that younger one had lost his life in the gravel pits, he would have died an innocent man."

Away to the yard now, as fast as her legs would carry her. In turning in, she ran against Austin Clay.

"I want to speak with Mr. Hunter," she imperiously said. "Mr. Lewis Hunter—not the one I saw in the gig."

"Mr. Hunter is out of town, Miss Gwinn," was Austin's reply. "We do not expect him at the yard to-day; he will not be home in time to come to it."

"Boy! you are deceiving me!"

"Indeed I am not," he returned. "Why should I? Mr. Hunter is not in the habit of being denied to applicants. You might have spoken to him yesterday when you saw him, had it pleased you so to do."

"I never saw him yesterday."

"Yes, you did, Miss Gwinn. That gentleman who came into the office and bowed to you was Mr. Hunter."

She stared Austin full in the face, as if unable to believe what he said. "*That* Mr. Hunter?—Lewis Hunter?"

"It was."

"If so, *how* he is altered!" And, throwing up her arms with a strange, wild gesture, she turned and strode out of the yard. The next moment Austin saw her come into it again.

"I want Mr. Lewis Hunter's private address, Austin Clay."

But Austin was on his guard now. He did not relish the idea of giving anybody's private address to such a person as Miss Gwinn, who might or might not be mad. She detected his reluctance.

"Keep it from me if you choose, boy!" she said, with a laugh that had a ring of scorn. "Better for you perhaps to be on the safe side. The first workman I meet will give it me, or a court guide."

And thus saying, she finally turned away. At any rate for the time being.

Austin Clay resumed his work, and the day passed on to evening. When business was over, he went home to make some alteration in his dress, for he had to go by appointment to Mr. Hunter's, and on these occasions he generally remained with them. It was beginning to grow dusk, and a chillness seemed to be in the air.

The house occupied by Mr. Hunter was one of the best in the west-central square. Ascending to it by a flight of steps, and passing through a pillared portico, you found yourself in a handsome hall, paved in imitation of mosaic. Two spacious sitting-rooms were on the left; the front one was used as a dining-room, the other opened to a conservatory. On the right of the hall, a broad flight of stairs led to the apartments above,

one of which was a fine drawing-room, fitted up with costly elegance.

Mr. and Mrs. Hunter were seated in the dining-room. Florence was there likewise, but not seated ; it may be questioned if she ever did sit, except when compelled. Dinner was over, but they frequently made this their evening sitting-room. The drawing-room up-stairs was grand, the room behind was dull ; this was cheerful, and looked out on the square. Especially cheerful it looked on this evening, for a fire had been lighted in the grate, and it cast a warm glow around in the fading twilight.

Austin Clay was shown in, and invited to a seat by the fire, near Mrs. Hunter. He had come in obedience to orders from Mr. Hunter, issued to him when he, Mr. Hunter, had been going out that morning. His journey had been connected with certain buildings then in process, and he thought he might have directions to give with respect to the following morning's early work.

A few minutes given by Austin and his master to business matters, and then the

latter left the room, and Austin turned to Mrs. Hunter. Unusually delicate she looked, as she half sat, half lay back in her chair, the firelight playing on her features. Florence had dragged forth a stool, and was sitting on it in a queer sort of fashion, one leg under her, at Austin's feet. He was a great favourite of hers, and she made no secret of the liking.

"You are not looking well this evening," he observed, in a gentle tone, to Mrs. Hunter.

"I am not feeling well. I scarcely ever do feel well; never strong. I sometimes think, Mr. Clay, what a mercy it is that we are not permitted to foresee the future. If we could, some of us might be tempted to—to—" she hesitated, and then went on in a lower tone—"to pray that God might take us in youth."

"The longer we live the more we become impressed with the wonderful wisdom that exists in the ordering of all things," replied Austin. "My years have not been many, comparatively speaking; but I see it always,

and I know that I shall see it more and more."

"The confirmed invalid, the man of care and sorrow, the incessant battle for existence with those reduced to extreme poverty—had they seen their future, as in a mirror, how could they have borne to enter upon it?" dreamily observed Mrs. Hunter. "And yet, I have heard people exclaim, 'How I wish I could foresee my destiny, and what is to happen to me!'"

"But the cares and ills of the world do not come near you, Mrs. Hunter," spoke Austin, after a pause of thought.

Mrs. Hunter smiled. "From the cares and crosses of the world, as we generally estimate cares and crosses, I am free. God has spared them to me. He does not overwhelm us with ills; if one ill is particularly our portion, we are generally spared from others. Mine lie in my want of health, and in the thought that—that—I am rarely free from pain and suffering," she concluded. But Austin felt that it was not what she had been about to say.

"What should we do if *all* the ills came

to us, mamma?" cried Florence, who had been still, and was listening.

"My dear, if all the ills came to us, God would show us a way to bear them. You know that He has promised so much: and His promises cannot fail."

"Clay," cried Mr. Hunter, returning to the room and resuming his seat, "did any one in particular call and want me to-day?"

"No, sir. Several came, but Mr. Henry saw them."

"Did Arkwright come?" resumed Mr. Hunter?

"I think not; I did not see him. That—lady—who was there yesterday, came again. She asked for you."

A pause. Then Mr. Hunter spoke up sharply. "For my brother, you mean. She must have wanted him."

"She certainly asked for you, sir. For Mr. Lewis Hunter."

Those little ears pricked themselves up, and their owner unceremoniously wheeled herself round on her stool, holding on by Austin's knee, as she faced her father.

"There was a lady came to John Baxendale's rooms to-day, when I and Dobson were there, and she asked for Mr. Lewis Hunter. At least—it was the funniest thing, papa—she saw Uncle Henry talking to John Baxendale, and she came up and said he was Mr. Lewis, and asked where he lived. John Baxendale said it was Mr. Henry Hunter, and she said no, it was not Mr. Henry Hunter, it was Mr. Lewis. So then we found out that she had mistaken him for you, and that it was you she wanted. Who was she, papa?"

"She—she—her business was with Henry," spoke Mr. Hunter, in so confused, so startled a sort of tone, not as if answering the child, more as if defending himself to any who might be around, that Austin looked up involuntarily. His face had grown lowering and angry, and he moved his position, so that his wife's gaze should not fall upon it. Austin's did, though.

At that moment there was heard a knock and ring at the house door, the presumable announcement of a visitor. Florence, much

addicted to acting upon natural impulse, and thereby getting into constant hot water with her governess, who assured her nothing could be more unbefitting a young lady, quitted her stool and flew to the window. By dint of flattening her nose and crushing her curls against a corner of one of its panes, she contrived to obtain a partial view of the visitor.

“Oh dear ! I hoped it was Uncle Bevary. Mamma's always better when he comes ; he tells her she is not so ill as she fancies. Papa !”

“What ?” cried Mr. Hunter quickly.

“I do believe it is that same lady who came to John Baxendale's. She is as tall as a house.”

What possessed Mr. Hunter ? He started up ; he sprung half-way across the room, hesitated there, and glided back again. Glided stealthily as it were ; and stealthily touching Austin Clay, motioned him to follow him. His hands were trembling ; and the dark frown, full of embarrassment, was still upon his features. Mrs. Hunter noticed nothing unusual ; the apartment was shaded

in twilight, and she sat with her head turned to the fire.

"Go to that woman, Clay!" came forth in a whisper from Mr. Hunter's compressed lips, as he drew Austin outside the room. "I cannot see her. *You go.*"

"What am I to say?" questioned Austin, feeling surprised and bewildered.

"Anything; anything. Only keep her from me."

He turned back into the room as he spoke, and closed the door softly, for Miss Gwinn was already in the hall. The servant had said his master was at home, and was conducting her to the room where his master and mistress sat, supposing it was some friend come to pay an hour's visit. Austin thought he heard Mr. Hunter slip the bolt of the dining-room, as he walked forward to receive Miss Gwinn.

Austin's words were quick and sharp, arresting the servant's footsteps. "Not there, Mark! Miss Gwinn," he courteously added, presenting himself before her, "Mr. Hunter is unable to see you this evening."

"Who gave *you* authority to interfere, Austin Clay?" was the response, not spoken in a raving, angry tone, but in one of cold, concentrated determination. "I demand an interview with Lewis Hunter. That he is at home, I know, for I saw him through the window, in the reflection of the firelight, as I stood on the steps; and here I will remain until I obtain speech of him, be it until tomorrow morning, be it until days to come. Do you note my words, meddling boy? I *demand* the interview; I do not crave it: he best knows by what right."

She sat deliberately down on one of the hall chairs. Austin, desperately at a loss what to do, and seeing no means of getting rid of her save by forcible expulsion, knocked gently at the room door again. Mr. Hunter drew it cautiously open to admit him; then slipped the bolt, entwined his arm within Austin's and drew him to the window. Mrs. Hunter's attention was absorbed by Florence, who was chattering to her.

"She has taken a seat in the hall, sir," he whispered. "She says she will remain there

until she sees you, though she should have to wait until the morning. I am sure she means it: stop there, she will. She says she demands the interview as a right."

"No," said Mr. Hunter, "she possesses no *right*. But—perhaps I had better see her, and get it over: otherwise she may make a disturbance. Tell Mark to show her into the drawing-room, Clay; and you stay here and talk to Mrs. Hunter."

"What is the matter, that you are whispering? Does any one want you?" interrupted Mrs. Hunter, whose attention was at length attracted.

"I am telling Clay that people have no right to come to my private house on business matters," was the reply given by Mr. Hunter. "However, as the person is here, I must see her, I suppose. Do not let us be interrupted, Louisa."

"But what does she want?—it was a lady, Florence said. Who is she?" reiterated Mrs. Hunter.

"It is a matter of business of Henry's. She ought to have gone to him." Mr.

Hunter looked at his wife and at Austin as he spoke. The latter was leaving the room to do his bidding, and Miss Gwinn suffered herself to be conducted quietly to the drawing-room.

A full hour did the interview last. The voices seemed occasionally to be raised in anger, so that the sound penetrated to their ears down stairs, from the room over-head. Mrs. Hunter grew impatient ; the tea waited on the table, and she wanted it. At length they were heard to descend, and to cross the hall.

"James is showing her out himself," said Mrs. Hunter. "Will you tell him we are waiting tea, Mr. Clay ?"

Austin stepped into the hall, and started when he caught sight of the face of Mr. Hunter. He was turning back from closing the door on Miss Gwinn, and the bright rays of the hall lamp fell full upon his countenance. It was of ghastly whiteness ; its expression one living aspect of terror, of dread. He staggered, rather than walked, to a chair, and sank into it. Austin hastened to him.

"Oh, sir, what is it? You are ill?"

The strong man, the proud master, calm hitherto in his native self-respect, was for the moment overcome. He leaned his forehead upon Austin's arm, hiding its pallor, and put up his finger for silence.

"I have had a stab, Clay," he whispered. "Bear with me, lad, for a minute. I have had a cruel stab."

Austin really did not know whether to take the words literally. "A stab?" he hesitatingly repeated.

"Ay. Here," touching his heart. "I wish I was dead, Clay. I wish I had died years ago; or that *she* had. Why was she permitted to live?—to live to work me this awful wrong?" he dreamily wailed. "An awful wrong to me and mine!"

"What is it?" spoke Austin, upon impulse. "A wrong? Who has done it?"

"She has. The woman now gone out. She has done it all."

He rose, and appeared to be looking for his hat. "Mrs. Hunter is waiting tea, sir," said the amazed Austin.

"Tea!" repeated Mr. Hunter, as if his brain were bewildered; "I cannot go in again to-night; I cannot see them. Make some excuse for me, Clay—anything. *Why* did that woman work me this crying wrong?"

He took his hat, opened the hall door, and shut it after him with a bang, leaving Austin in wondering consternation.

He returned to the dining-room, and said Mr. Hunter had been obliged to go out on business; he did not know what else to say. Florence was sent to bed after tea, but Austin sat a short while longer with Mrs. Hunter. Something led back to the previous conversation, when Mrs. Hunter had been alluding to her state of health, and to some sorrow that was her daily portion.

"What is it?" asked Austin, in his impulsive manner.

"The thought that I shall have to leave Florence without a mother."

"Dear Mrs. Hunter, surely it is not so serious as that! You may get better."

"Yes; I know I may. Dr. Bevary tells me that I shall. But, you see, the very fear

of it is hard to bear. Sometimes I think God is reconciling me to it by slow degrees."

Later in the evening, as Austin was going home, he passed a piece of clear ground, to be let for building purposes, at the end of the square. There, in its darkest corner, far back from the road, paced a man as if in some mental agony, his hat carried in his hands, and his head bared to the winds. Austin peered through the night with his quick sight, and recognised Mr. Hunter.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MR. SHUCK AT HOME.

DAFFODIL'S DELIGHT was in a state of commotion. It has often been remarked that there exists more real sympathy between the working classes, one for another, than amongst those of a higher grade ; and experience generally seems to bear it out. From one end of Daffodil's Delight to the other there ran just now a deep feeling of sorrow, of pity, of commiseration. Men made inquiries of each other as they passed in the street ; women congregated at their doors to talk, concern on their faces, a question on their lips—"How is she ? What does the doctor say ?"

Yes ; the excitement had its rise in one cause alone—the increased illness of Mrs. Baxendale. The physician had pronounced

his opinion (little need to speak it, though, for the fact was only too apparent to all who used their eyes), and the news had gone forth to Daffodil's Delight—Mrs. Baxendale was past recovery ; was, in fact, dying !

The concern, universal as it was, showed itself in various ways. Visits and neighbourly calls were so incessant, that the Shucks openly rebelled at the “trampling up and down through their living-room,” by which route the Baxendale apartments could alone be gained. The neighbours came to help ; to nurse ; to shake up the bed and pillows ; to prepare condiments over the fire ; to condole ; and, above all, to gossip : with tears in their eyes and lamentation in their tones, and ominous shakes of the head, and uplifted hands ; but still, to gossip : *that* lies in human female nature. They brought offerings of savoury delicacies ; or things that, in their ideas, stood for delicacies—dainties likely to tempt the sick. Mrs. Cheek made a pint jug of what she called “buttered beer,” a miscellaneous compound of scalding-hot porter, gin, eggs, sugar, and

spice. Mrs. Baxendale sipped a little ; but it did not agree with her fevered palate, and she declined it for the future, with "thanks, all the same," and Mrs. Cheek and a crony or two disposed of it themselves with great satisfaction. All this served to prove two things—that good feeling ran high in Daffodil's Delight, and that means did not run low.

Of all the visitors, the most effectual assistant was Mrs. Quale. She gossiped, it is true, or it had not been Mrs. Quale ; but she gave efficient help ; and the invalid was always glad to see her come in, which could not be said with regard to all. Daffodil's Delight was not wrong in the judgment it passed upon Mary Baxendale—that she was a "poor creature." True ; poor as to being clever in a domestic point of view, and in attending upon the sick. In mind, in cultivation, in refinement, in gentleness, Mary Baxendale beat Daffodil's Delight hollow ; she was also a beautiful seamstress ; but in energy and capability Mary was sadly wanting. She was timid always—painfully

timid in the sick-room ; anxious to do for her mother all that was requisite, but never knowing how to set about it. Mrs. Quale remedied this ; she did the really efficient part ; Mary gave love and gentleness ; and, between the two, Mrs. Baxendale was thankful and happy.

John Baxendale, not a demonstrative man, was full of concern and grief. His had been a very happy home, free from domestic storms and clouds ; and, to lose his wife, was anything but a cheering prospect. His wages were good, and they had wanted for nothing, not even for peace. To such, when trouble comes, it seems hard to bear—it almost seems as if it came as a *wrong*.

"Just hold your tongue, John Baxendale," cried Mrs. Quale one day, upon hearing him express something to this effect. "Because you have never had no crosses, is it any reason that you never shall ? No. Crosses come to us all sometime in our lives, in one shape or other."

"But it's a hard thing for it to come in this shape," retorted Baxendale, pointing to

the bed. "I'm not repining or rebelling against what it pleases God to do ; but I can't *see* the reason of it. Look at some of the other wives in Daffodil's Delight ; shrieking, raving trollops, turning their homes into a bear-garden with their tempers, and driving their husbands almost mad. If some of them were taken they'd never be missed : just the contrary."

"John," interposed Mrs. Baxendale in her quiet voice, "when I am gone up there"—pointing with her finger to the blue October sky—"it may make you think more of the time when you must come ; may help you to be preparing for it, better than you have done."

Mary lifted her wan face, glowing now with the excitement of the thought. "Father, *that* may be the end—the reason. I think that troubles are sent to us in mercy, not in anger."

"Think ?" ejaculated Mrs. Quale, tossing back her head with a manner less reverent than her words. "Before you shall have come to my age, girl, it's to be hoped you'll

*know* they are. Isn't it time for the medicine?" she continued, seeing no other opening for a reprimand just then.

It was time for the medicine, and Mrs. Quale poured it out, raised the invalid from her pillow, and administered it. John Baxendale looked on. Like his daughter Mary, he was in these matters an incapable man.

"How long is it since Dr. Bevary was here?" he asked.

"Let's see?" responded Mrs. Quale, who liked to have most of the talking to herself, wherever she might be. "This is Friday. Tuesday, wasn't it, Mary? Yes, he was here on Tuesday."

"But why does he not come oftener?" cried John, in a tone of resentment. "That's what I was wanting to ask about. When one is as ill as she is—in danger of dying—is it right that a doctor should never come a-near for three or four days?"

"Oh, John! a great physician like Dr. Bevary!" remonstrated his wife. "It is so very good of him to come at all. And for

nothing, too! He as good as said to Mary he didn't mean to charge."

"I can pay him; I'm capable of paying him, I hope," spoke John Baxendale. "Who said I wanted my wife to be attended out of charity?"

"It's not just that, father, I think," said Mary. "He comes more in a friendly way."

"Friendly or not, it isn't come to the pass yet, that I can't pay a doctor," said John Baxendale. "Who has let it go abroad that I couldn't?"

Taking up his hat, he went out on the spur of the moment, and bent his steps to Dr. Bevary's. There he was civil and humble enough, for John Baxendale was courteous by nature. The doctor was at home, and saw him at once.

"Listen, my good man," said Dr. Bevary, when he had caught somewhat of his errand. "If, by going round often, I could do any good to your wife, I should go. Twice a day; three times a day—by night, too, if necessary. But I cannot do her good: had she a doctor over her bed constantly, he

could render no service. I step round now and then, because I see that it is a satisfaction to her, and to those about her; not for any use I can be. I told you a week ago the end was not very far off, and that she would meet it calmly. She will be in no further pain—no worse than she is now."

"I am able to pay you, sir."

"That is not the question. If you paid me a guinea every time I came round, I should visit her no more frequently than I do."

"And, if you please, sir, I'd rather pay you," continued the man. "I'm sure I don't grudge it; and it goes against the grain to have it said that John Baxendale's wife is attended out of charity. We English workmen, sir, are independent, and proud of being so."

"Very good," said Dr. Bevary. "I should be sorry to see the day come when English workmen lost their independence. As to 'charity,' we will talk a bit about that. Look here, Baxendale," the doctor added, laying his hand upon his shoulder, in his kind and familiar way, "you and I can

speak reasonably together, as man to man. We both have to work for our living—you with the hands, I chiefly with the head—so, in that, we are equal. I go twice a week to see your wife ; I have told you why it is useless to go oftener. When patients come to me, they pay me a guinea, and I see them twice for it, which is equivalent to half-a-guinea a visit ; but, when I go to patients at their own houses, my fee is a guinea each time. Now, would it seem to you a neighbourly act that I should take two guineas weekly from your wages ?—quite as much, or more, than you gain. What does my going round cost me ? A few minutes' time ; a gossip with Mrs. Quale, touching the doings of Daffodil's Delight, and a groan at those thriftless Shucks, in their pigsty of a room. That is the plain statement of facts ; and I should like to know what there is in it that need put your English spirit up. Charity ! We might call it by that name, John Baxendale, if I were the guinea each time out of pocket, through medicines or other things furnished to you.”

John Baxendale smiled ; but he looked only three parts convinced.

“ Tush, man ! ” said the doctor ; “ I may be asking you to do me some friendly service, one of these days, and then, you know, we should be quits. Eh, John ? ”

John Baxendale half put out his hand, and the doctor shook it.

“ I think I understand now, sir ; and I thank you heartily for what you have said. I only wish you could do some good to the wife.”

“ I wish I could, Baxendale,” he replied, throwing a kindly glance after the man as he was moving away ; “ I shan’t bring an action against you in the county court for these unpaid fees, Baxendale, for it wouldn’t stand,” called out the doctor. “ I never was called in to see your wife—I went of my own accord, and have so continued to go, and shall so continue. Good day.”

As John Baxendale was descending the steps of the house door, he encountered Mrs. Hunter. She stopped him to inquire after his wife.

"Getting weaker daily, ma'am, thank you. The doctor has just told me again that there's no hope."

"I am truly sorry to hear it," said Mrs. Hunter. "I will call in and see her. I did intend to call before, but something or other has caused me to put it off."

John Baxendale touched his hat, and departed. Mrs. Hunter went in to her brother.

"Oh, is it you, Louisa?" he exclaimed. "A visit from you is somewhat a rarity. Are you feeling worse?"

"Rather better, I think, than usual. I have just met John Baxendale," continued Mrs. Hunter, sitting down, and untying her bonnet strings. "He says there is no hope for his wife. Poor woman! I wish it had been different. Many a worse woman could have been better spared."

"Ah," said the doctor, "if folks were taken according to our notions of whom might be best spared, what a world this would be! Where's Miss Florence?"

"I did not bring her out with me, Robert."

I came round to say a word to you about James," resumed Mrs. Hunter, her voice insensibly lowering itself to a tone of confidence. "Something is the matter with him, and I cannot imagine what."

"Been eating too many cucumbers again, no doubt," cried the doctor. "He *will* go in at that cross-grained vegetable, let it be in season, or out."

"Eating!" returned Mrs. Hunter, "I wish he did eat. For at least a fortnight—more, I think—he has not eaten enough to support a bird. That he is ill, is evident to all—must be evident; but when I ask him what is the matter, he persists in it that he is quite well; that I am fanciful: seems annoyed, in short, that I should allude to it. Has he been here to consult you?"

"No," replied Dr. Bevary; "this is the first I have heard of it. How does he seem? What are his symptoms?"

"It appears to me," said Mrs. Hunter, almost in a whisper, "that the malady is more on the mind. There is no palpable disorder. He is restless, nervous, agitated;

so restless at night, that he has now taken to sleep in a room apart from mine—not to disturb me, he says. I fear—I fear he may have been attacked with some dangerous inward malady, that he is concealing. His father, you know, died of——”

“ Pooh ! Nonsense ! You are indeed becoming fanciful, Louisa,” interrupted the doctor. “ Old Mr. Hunter died of an unusual disorder, I admit ; but, if the symptoms of such appeared in either James or Henry, they would come galloping to me in hot haste, asking if my skill could suggest a preventive. It is no ‘inward malady,’ depend upon it. He has been smoking too much : or going in at the cucumbers.”

“ Robert, it is something far more serious than that,” quietly rejoined Mrs. Hunter.

“ When did you first notice him to be ill ?”

“ It is, I say, about a fortnight since. One evening there came a stranger to our house, a lady, and she *would* see him. He did not want to see her : he sent young Clay to her, who happened to be with us ; but she insisted upon seeing James. They were

closeted together a long while before she left ; and then James went out—on business, Mr. Clay said."

" Well ? " cried Dr. Bevary. " What has the lady to do with it ? "

" I am not sure that she has anything to do with it. Florence told an incomprehensible story about the lady's having gone into Baxendale's that afternoon, after seeing her uncle Henry in the street and mistaking him for James. A Miss—what was the name ? —Gwinn, I think."

Dr. Bevary, who happened to have a small glass phial in his hand, let it fall to the ground ; whether by inadvertence, or that the words startled him, he best knew. " Well ? " was all he repeated, after he had gathered the pieces in his hand.

" I waited up till twelve o'clock, and James never came in. I heard him let himself in afterwards with his latch-key, and come up into the dressing-room. I called out to know where he had been, it is so unusual for him to stay out, and he said he was much occupied, and that I was to go to

sleep, for he had some writing to do. But, Robert, instead of writing, he was pacing the house all night, out of one room into another ; and in the morning—oh, I wish you could have seen him!—he looked wild, wan, haggard, as one does who has got up out of a long illness ; and I am positive he had been weeping. From that time I have noticed the change I tell you of. He seems like one going into his grave. But, whether the illness is upon the body or the mind, I know not.”

Dr. Bevary appeared intent upon putting together the pieces of his phial, making them fit into each other.

“It will all come right, Louisa ; don’t fret yourself : something must have gone cross in his business. I’ll call in at the office and see him.”

“Do not say that I have spoken to you. He seems to have quite a nervous dread of its being observed that anything is wrong with him ; has spoken sharply, not in anger, but in anguish, when I have pressed the question.”

"As if the lady could have had anything to do with it!" exclaimed Dr. Bevary, in a tone of satire.

"I do not suppose she had. I only mention the circumstances because it is since that evening he has changed. You can see what you think of him, and tell me afterwards."

The answer was only a nod; and Mrs. Hunter went out. Dr. Bevary remained in a brown study. His servant came in with an account that patient after patient was waiting for him, but the doctor replied by a repelling gesture, and the man did not again dare to intrude. Perplexity and pain sat upon his brow; and, when at last he did rouse himself, he raised aloft his hands, and gave utterance to words that sounded very like a prayer: "I pray Heaven it may not be so! It would kill Louisa."

The pale, delicate face of Mrs. Hunter was at that moment bending over the invalid in her bed. In her soft, grey silk dress and light shawl, her simple straw bonnet with its white ribbons, she looked just the right

sort of visitor for a sick chamber ; and her voice was sweet, and her manner gentle.

"No, ma'am, don't speak of hope to me," murmured Mrs. Baxendale. "I know that there is none left, and I am quite reconciled to die. I have been an ailing woman for years, dear lady ; and it is wonderful how those that are so get to look upon death, if they can but presume to hope their soul is safe, with satisfaction, rather than with dread. Though I dare not say as much yet to my poor husband."

"I have long been ailing, too," softly replied Mrs. Hunter. "I am rarely free from pain, and I know that I shall never be healthy and strong again. But still—I do fear it would give me pain to die, were the fiat to come forth."

"Never fear, dear lady," cried the invalid, her eyes brightening. "Before the fiat does come, be assured that God will have reconciled you to it. Ah, ma'am, what matters it, after all ? It is a journey we *must* take ; and, when once we are prepared, it seems but the setting off a little sooner or a little

later. I got Mary to read me the burial service on Sunday : I was always fond of it ; but I am past reading now. In one part thanks are given to God for that he has been pleased to deliver the dead out of the miseries of this sinful world. Ma'am, if He did not remove us to a better and a happier home, would the living be directed to give thanks for our departure from this ? ”

“ A spirit ripe for heaven,” thought Mrs. Hunter, when she took her leave.

It was Mrs. Quale who piloted her through the room of the Shucks. Of all scenes of disorder and discomfort, about the worst reigned there. Sam had been—you must excuse the inelegance of the phrase, but it was much in vogue in Daffodil’s Delight—“ on the loose ” again for a couple of days. He sat sprawling across the hearth, a pipe in his mouth, and a pot of porter at his feet. The wife was crying with her hair down ; the children were quarrelling in tatters ; the dirt in the place, as Mrs. Quale expressed it, stood on end ; and Mrs.

Hunter wondered how people could bear to live so.

"Now, Sam Shuck, don't you see who is a standing in your presence ?" sharply cried Mrs. Quale.

Sam, his back to the staircase door, really had not seen. He threw his pipe into the grate, started up, and pulled his hair to Mrs. Hunter in a very humble fashion. In his hurry he turned over a small child, and the contents of the pewter pot upon it. The child roared; the wife took it up and shook its clothes in Sam's face, restraining her tongue till the lady should be gone; and Mrs. Hunter stepped into the garden out of the *mélée*—glad to get there: Sam following her in a spirit of politeness.

"How is it you are not at work to-day, Shuck?" she asked.

"I am going to-morrow—I shall go for certain, ma'am."

"You know, Shuck, I never do interfere with Mr. Hunter's men," said Mrs. Hunter. "I consider that intelligent workmen, as you are, ought to be above any advice that I

could offer. But I cannot help saying how sad it is that you should waste your time. Were you not discharged a little while ago, and taken on again under a specific promise, made by you to Mr. Henry Hunter, that you would be diligent in future?"

"I am diligent," grumbled Sam. "But why, ma'am—a chap must take holiday now and then. 'Tain't in human nature to be always having the shoulder at the wheel."

"Well, pray be cautious," said Mrs. Hunter. "If you offend again, and get discharged, I know they will not be so ready to take you back. Remember your little children, and be steady for their sakes."

Sam went indoors to his pipe, to his wife's tongue, and to despatch a child to get the pewter pot replenished.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### FIVE THOUSAND POUNDS !

MRS. HUNTER, turning out of Mr. Shuck's gate, stepped inside Mrs. Quale's, who was astonishing her with the shortcomings of the Shucks, and prophesying that their destiny would be the workhouse, when Austin Clay came forth. He had been home to dinner, and was now going back to the yard. Mrs Hunter said good morning to her talkative friend, and walked away by Austin's side—Mrs. Baxendale, Sam Shuck, and Daffodil's Delight generally, forming themes of converse. Austin raised his hat to her when they came to the gates of the yard.

"No, I am not about to part ; I am going in with you," said Mrs. Hunter. "I want to speak just a word to my husband, if he is at liberty. Will you find him for me ?"

"He has been in his private room all the morning, and is probably there still," said Austin. "Do you know where Mr. Hunter is?" he inquired of a man whom they met.

"In his room, sir," was the reply, as the man touched his cap to Mrs. Hunter.

Austin led the way down the passage, and knocked at the door, Mrs. Hunter following him. There was no answer; and believing, in consequence, that it was empty, he opened it.

Two gentlemen stood within it, near a table, paper and pens and ink before them, and what looked like a cheque-book. They must have been deeply absorbed not to have heard the knock. One was Mr. Hunter: the other—Austin recognised him—Gwinn, the lawyer, of Ketterford. "I will not sign it!" Mr. Hunter was exclaiming, with passionate vehemence. "Five thousand pounds! it would cripple me for life."

"Then you know the alternative. I go this moment and——"

"Mrs. Hunter wishes to speak to you, sir," interposed Austin, drowning the words

and speaking loudly. The gentlemen turned sharply round ; and when Mr. Hunter caught sight of his wife, the red passion of his face turned to a livid pallor. Lawyer Gwinn nodded familiarly to Austin.

"How are you, Clay ? Getting on, I hope. *Who* is this person, may I ask ?"

"This lady is Mrs. Hunter," haughtily replied Austin after a pause, surprised that Mr. Hunter did not take up the words—the offensive manner in which they were spoken—the insulting look that accompanied them. But Mr. Hunter did not appear in a state to take anything up just then.

Gwinn bent his body to the ground.

"I beg the lady's pardon. I had no idea she was Mrs. Hunter."

But so ultra-courteous were the tones, so low the bow, that Austin Clay's cheeks burnt at the covert irony.

"James, you are ill," said Mrs. Hunter, advancing in her quiet, composed manner, but taking no notice whatever of the stranger. "Can I get anything for you ? Shall we send for Dr. Bevary ?"

"No, don't do that ; it is going off. You will oblige me by leaving us," he whispered to her. "I am very busy."

"You seem too ill for business," she rejoined. "Can you not put it off for an hour ? Rest might be of service to you."

"No, madam, the business cannot be put off," spoke up Lawyer Gwinn.

And down he sat in a chair, with a determined air of conscious power—just as his sister had sat *herself* down, a fortnight before, in Mr. Hunter's hall.

Mrs. Hunter quitted the room at once, leaving her husband and the stranger in it. Austin followed her. Her face wore a puzzled, vexed look, as she turned it upon Austin. "Who is that person ?" she asked. "His manner to me appeared to be strangely insolent."

An instinct, for which Austin perhaps could not have accounted had he tried, caused him to suppress the fact that it was the brother of the Miss Gwinn who had raised a commotion at Mr. Hunter's house. He answered that he had not seen the

person at the office previously, his tone being as careless a one as he could assume. And Mrs. Hunter, who was of the least suspicious nature possible, let it pass. Her mind, too, was filled with the thought of her husband's suffering state.

"Does Mr. Hunter appear to you to be ill?" she asked of Austin, somewhat abruptly.

"He looked so, I think."

"Not now; I am not alluding to the present moment," she rejoined. "Have you noticed before that he does not seem well?"

"Yes," replied Austin; "this week or two past."

There was a brief pause.

"Mr. Clay," she resumed, in a quiet, kind voice, "my health, as you are aware, is not good, and any sort of uneasiness tries me much. I am going to ask you a confidential question. I would not put it to many, and the asking it of you proves that my esteem for you is great. That Mr. Hunter is ill, there is no doubt; but whether mentally or bodily I am unable to discover. To me he

observes a most unusual reticence, his object probably being to spare me pain ; but I can battle better with a known evil than with an unknown one. Tell me, if you can, whether any vexation has arisen in business matters ? ”

“ Not that I am aware of,” promptly replied Austin. “ I feel sure that nothing is amiss in that quarter.”

“ Then it is as I suspected, and he must be suffering from some illness that he is concealing.”

She wished Austin good morning. He saw her out of the gate, and then proceeded to the room he usually occupied when engaged in-doors. Presently he heard Mr. Hunter and his visitor come forth, and saw the latter pass the window. Mr. Hunter came into the room.

“ Is Mrs. Hunter gone ? ”

“ Yes, sir.”

“ Do you know what she wanted ? ”

“ I do not think it was anything particular. She said she should like to say a word to you, if you were disengaged.”

Mr. Hunter did not speak immediately. Austin was making out certain estimates, and his master looked over his shoulder. Not *to look*; his mind was evidently all pre-occupied.

"Did Mrs. Hunter inquire who it was that was with me?" he presently said.

"She inquired, sir. I did not say. I told her I had not seen the person here before."

"*You knew?*" in a quick, sharp accent.

"Oh, yes."

"Then why did you not tell her? What was your motive for concealing it?"

The inquiry was uttered in a tone that could not be construed as proceeding from any emotion but that of fear. A flush came into Austin's ingenuous face.

"I beg your pardon, sir. I never wish to be otherwise than open. But, as you had previously desired me not to speak of the lady who came to your house that night, I did not know but the same wish might apply to the visit of to-day."

"True, true," murmured Mr. Hunter; "I

do *not* wish this visit of the man's spoken of. Never mention his name, especially to Mrs. Hunter. I suppose he did not impose upon me," added he, with a poor attempt at a forced smile : "it *was* Gwinn, of Ketterford, was it not ?"

"Certainly," said Austin, feeling surprised.  
"Did you not know him previously, sir ?"

"Never. And I wish I had not known him now."

"If—if—will you forgive my saying, sir, that, should you have any transaction with him, touching money matters, it is necessary to be wary. Many a one has had cause to rue the getting into the clutches of Lawyer Gwinn."

A deep, heavy sigh, burst from Mr. Hunter. He had turned from Austin. The latter spoke again in his ardent sympathy.

"Sir, is there any way in which I can serve you ?—*any* way ? You have only to command me."

"No, no, Clay. I fell into that man's clutches—as you have aptly termed it—years ago, and the penalty must be paid. There is no help for it."

"Not knowing him, sir?"

"Not knowing him. And not knowing that I owed it, as I certainly did not know, until a week or two back. I no more suspected that—that I was indebted there, than that I was indebted to you."

Mr. Hunter had grown strangely confused and agitated, and the dew was rising on his livid face. He made a hollow attempt to laugh it off, and seemed to shun the gaze of his clerk.

"This comes of the freaks of young men," he observed, facing Austin after a pause, and speaking volubly. "Austin Clay, I will give you a piece of advice. Never put your hand to a bill. You may think it an innocent bit of paper, which can cost you at most but the sum that is marked upon it; but it may come back to you in after years, and you must purchase it with thousands. Have nothing to do with bills, in any way; they will be a thorn in your side."

"So, it is a money affair!" thought Austin. "I might have known it was nothing else, where Gwinn was concerned."

Here's Dr. Bevary coming in, sir," he added aloud.

The physician was inside the room ere the words had left Austin's lips. Mr. Hunter had seized upon a stray plan and seemed bent upon its examination.

"Rather a keen-looking customer, that, whom I met at your gate," began the doctor.  
"Who was it?"

"Keen-looking customer?" repeated Mr. Hunter.

"A fellow dressed in black, with a squint and a white neckerchief; an ill-favoured fellow, whoever he is."

"How should I know about him?" replied Mr. Hunter, carelessly. "Somebody after the men, I suppose."

But Austin Clay felt that Mr. Hunter *did* know; that the description could only apply to Gwinn of Ketterford. Dr. Bevary entwined his arm within his brother-in-law's, and led him from the room.

"James, do you want doctoring?" he enquired, as they entered the one just vacated by Lawyer Gwinn.

"No, I don't. What do you mean?"

"If you don't, you belie your looks; that's all. Can you honestly affirm to me that you are in robust health?"

"I am in good health. There is nothing the matter with me."

"Then there's something else in the wind. What's the trouble?"

A flush rose to the face of Mr. Hunter.

"I am in no trouble that you can relieve; I am quite well. I repeat that I do not understand your meaning."

The doctor gazed at him keenly, and his tone changed to one of solemn earnestness.

"James, I suspect that you *are* in trouble. Now, I do not wish to pry into it unnecessarily; but I would remind you of the sound wisdom that lies in the good old proverb: 'In the multitude of counsellors there is safety.'"

"And if there is?" returned Mr. Hunter.

"If you will confide the trouble to me, I will do what I can to help you out of it—*whatever it may be*—to advise with you as to what is best to be done. I am your

wife's brother ; could you have a truer friend ? ”

“ You are very kind, Bevary. I am in no danger. When I am, I will let you know.”

The tone—one of playful mockery—grated on the ear of Dr. Bevary.

“ Is it assumed to hide what he dare not betray ? ” thought he.

Mr. Hunter cut the matter short by crossing the yard to the time-keeper’s office ; and Dr. Bevary went out talking to himself : “ A wilful man must have his own way.”

Austin Clay sat up late that night, reading one of the quarterly reviews ; he let the time slip by till the clock struck twelve. Mr. and Mrs. Quale had been in bed some time ; when nothing was wanted for Mr. Clay, Mrs. Quale was rigid in retiring at ten. Early to bed, and early to rise, was a maxim she was fond of, both in precept and practice. The striking of the church clock aroused him ; he closed the book, left it on the table, pulled aside the crimson curtain, and opened the window to look out at the night, before going into his chamber.

A still, balmy night. The stars shone in the heavens, and Daffodil's Delight, for aught that could be heard or seen just then, seemed almost as peaceful as they. Austin leaned from the window; his thoughts ran not upon the stars or upon the peaceful scene around, but upon the curious trouble which seemed to be overshadowing Mr. Hunter. "Five thousand pounds!" His ears had caught distinctly the ominous sum. "Could he have fallen into Lawyer Gwinn's 'clutches' to *that* extent?"

There was much in it that Austin could not fathom. Mr. Hunter had hinted at "bills;" Miss Gwinn had spoken of the "breaking up of her happy home;" two calamities apparently distinct and apart. And how was it that they were in ignorance of his name, his existence, his —

A startling interruption came to Austin's thoughts. Mrs. Shuck's door was pulled hastily open, and some one panting with excitement, uttering faint sobbing cries, came running down their garden into Peter Quale's. It was Mary Baxendale. She

knocked sharply at the door with nervous quickness.

"What is it, Mary ?" asked Austin.

She had not seen him ; but, of course, the words caused her to look up. "Oh, sir," the tears streaming from her eyes as she spoke, "would you please call Mrs. Quale, and ask her to step in. Mother's on the wing."

"I'll call her. Mary!"—for she was speeding back again—"can I get any other help for you ? If I can be of use, step back and tell me."

Sam Shuck came out of his house as Austin spoke, and went flying up Daffodil's Delight. He had gone for Dr. Bevary. The Doctor had desired to be called, should there be any sudden change. Of course, he did not mean the change of *death*. He could be of no use in that : but how could they discriminate ?

Mrs. Quale was dressed and in the sick chamber with all speed. Dr. Bevary was not long before he followed her. Neighbours on either side put their heads out.

Ten minutes at the most, and Dr. Bevary

was out again. Austin was then leaning over Peter Quale's gate. He had been in no urgent mood for bed before, and this little excitement, though it did not immediately concern him, afforded an excuse for not going to it.

"How is she, sir?"

"Is it you?" responded Dr. Bevary. "She is gone. I thought it would be sudden at the last."

"Poor thing!" ejaculated Austin.

"Poor thing? Ay, that's what we are all apt to say when our friends die. But there's little cause when the change has been prepared for, the spirit made ripe for heaven. She is gone to a world where there's neither sickness nor pain."

Austin made no reply. The doctor spoke again after a pause.

"Clay—to go from a solemn subject to one that—that may, however, prove not less solemn in the end—you heard me mention a stranger I met at the gates of the yard today, and Mr. Hunter would not take my question. Was it Gwinn of Ketterford?"

The doctor had spoken in a changed, low tone, laying his hand, in his earnestness, on Austin's shoulder. Austin paused. He did not know whether he ought to answer.

" You need not hesitate," said the doctor divining his scruples. " I can understand that Mr. Hunter may have forbidden you to mention it, and that you would be faithful to him. Don't speak ; your very hesitation has proved it to me. Good night, my young friend ; we would both serve him if we only knew how."

Austin watched him away, and then went indoors, for Daffodil's Delight began to be astir, and to collect itself around him, Sam Shuck having assisted in spreading the news touching Mrs. Baxendale. Daffodil's Delight thought nothing of leaving its bed, and issuing forth in shawls and pantaloons upon any rising emergency, regarding such interludes of disturbed rest as socially agreeable.

## CHAPTER IX.

### THE SEPARATION OF HUNTER AND HUNTER.

AUSTIN CLAY sat at his desk at Hunter and Hunter's, sorting the morning letters, which little matter of employment formed part of his duties. It was the morning subsequent to the commotion in Daffodil's Delight. His thoughts were running more on that than on the letters, when the postmark "Ketterford" on two of them, caught his eye.

The one was addressed to himself, the other to "Mr. Lewis Hunter," and the handwriting of both was the same. Disposing of the rest of the letters as usual, placing those for the Messrs. Hunter in their room, against they should arrive, and dealing out any others there might be for the hands employed in the firm, according to their address, he proceeded to open his own.

To the very end of it Austin read ; and then, and not till then, he began to suspect that it could not be meant for him. No name whatever was mentioned in the letter ; it began abruptly, and it ended abruptly ; not so much as "Sir," or "Dear Sir" was it complimented with, and it was simply signed "A. G." He read it a second time, and then its awful meaning flashed upon him, and a red flush rose to his brow and settled there, as if burnt into it with a branding iron. He had become possessed of a dangerous secret.

There was no doubt that the letter was written by Miss Gwinn to Mr. Hunter. By some extraordinary mischance, she had misdirected it. Possibly the letter, now lying on Mr. Hunter's desk, might be for Austin. Though, what could she be writing about to him ?

He sat down. He was quite overcome with the revelation ; it was, indeed, of a terrible nature, and he would have given much not to have become cognizant of it. "Bills!" "money!" So that had been Mr.

Hunter's excuse for the mystery ! No wonder he sought to turn suspicion into any channel but the real one.

Austin was poring over the letter like one in a nightmare, when Mr. Hunter interrupted him. He crushed it into his pocket with all the aspect of a guilty man ; any one might have taken him in his confusion so to be. Not for himself was he confused, but he feared lest Mr. Hunter should discover the letter. Although certainly written for him, Austin did not dare to hand it to him, for it would never do to let Mr. Hunter know that he possessed the secret. Mr. Hunter had come in, holding out the other letter from Ketterford.

" This letter is for you, Mr. Clay. It has been addressed to me by mistake, I conclude."

Austin took it, and glanced his eyes over it. It contained a few abrupt lines, and a smaller note, sealed, was inside it.

" My brother is in London, Austin Clay. I have reason to think he will be calling

upon the Messrs. Hunter. Will you watch for him, and give him the inclosed note? Had he told me where he should put up in town, I should have had no occasion to trouble you.—A. GWINN."

Austin did not lift his eyes to Mr. Hunter's in his usual candid, open manner. He could not bear to look him in the face; he feared lest his master might read in his the dreadful truth.

"What am I to do, sir?" he asked. "Watch for Gwinn, and give him the note?"

"Do this with them," said Mr. Hunter.

Striking a wax match, he held both Austin's note and the sealed one over the flame until they were consumed.

"You could not fulfil the request if you wished, for the man went back to Ketterford last night."

He said no more. He went away again, and Austin lighted another match, and burnt the crushed letter in his pocket, thankful, so far, that it had escaped Mr. Hunter.

Trouble came. Ere many days had elapsed, there was dissension in the house of Hunter and Hunter. Thoroughly united and cordial the brothers had always been ; but now a cause of dispute arose, and it seemed that it could not be arranged. Mr. Hunter had drawn out five thousand pounds from the bank, and refused to state for what, except that it was for a "private purpose." The business had been a gradually increasing one, and nearly all the money possessed by both was invested in it ; so much as was not actually out, lay in the bank in their joint names, "Hunter and Hunter." Each possessed a small private account, but nothing like sufficient to meet a cheque for five thousand pounds. Words ran high between them, and the sound penetrated to ears outside their private room.

His face pale, his lips compressed, his tone kept mostly subdued, James Hunter sat at his desk, his eyes falling on a ledger he was not occupied with, and his hand partially shading his face. Mr. Henry, more excited, giving way more freely to his anger, paced

the carpet, occasionally stopping before the desk and before his brother.

"It is the most unaccountable thing in the world," he reiterated, "that you should refuse to say what it has been applied to. Draw out, surreptitiously, a formidable sum like that, and not account for it! It is monstrous."

"Henry, I have told you all I can tell you," replied Mr. Hunter, concealing his countenance more than ever. "An old debt was brought up against me, and I was forced to satisfy it."

Mr. Henry Hunter curled his lip.

"A debt to that amount! Were you mad?"

"I did not—know—I—had—contracted it," stammered Mr. Hunter, very nearly losing his self-possession. "At least, I thought it had been paid. Youth's errors do come home to us sometimes in later life."

"Not to the tune of five thousand pounds," retorted Mr. Henry Hunter. "It will cripple the business; you know it will. It is next door to ruin."

"Nonsense, Henry! The loss of five thousand pounds will neither cripple the business nor bring ruin. It will be my own loss: not yours."

"How on earth could you think of giving it away? Five thousand pounds!"

"I could not help myself. Had I refused to pay it—"

"Well?" for Mr. Hunter had stopped in embarrassment.

"I should have been compelled to do so. There. Talking of it will not mend it."

Mr. Henry Hunter took a few turns, and then wheeled round sharply. "Perhaps there are other claims for 'youth's follies' to come behind it?"

The words seemed to arouse Mr. Hunter. Not to anger; but to what looked very like fear—almost to an admission that it might be so.

"Were any such further claim to come, I would not satisfy it," he cried, wiping his face. "No, I would not; I would go into exile first."

"We must part," said Mr. Henry Hunter,

the expression of his brother's face quite startling him. "There is no alternative. I cannot risk the beggarizing of my wife and children."

"If it must be so, it must," was all the reply given.

"Tell me the truth, James," urged Mr. Henry, in a more conciliatory tone. "I don't want to part. Tell me all, and let me be the judge. Surely, man! it can't be anything so very dreadful. You didn't set fire to your neighbour's house, I suppose?"

"I never thought the claim could come upon me. That is all I can tell you."

"Then we part," decisively returned Mr. Henry Hunter.

"Yes, it may be better. If I am to go to ruin, it is of no use to drag you down into it."

"If you are to go to ruin!" echoed Mr. Henry, regarding his brother attentively. "James! is that an admission that other mysterious claims may really follow this one?"

"No, I think they will not. But we had better part. Only—let the cause of our separation be kept from the world."

"I should be clever to betray the cause, seeing that you leave me in ignorance of what it may be," answered Mr. Henry Hunter, who was feeling vexed, puzzled, and very angry.

"I mean—let no shadow of the truth get abroad. The business is large enough for two firms, and we have agreed to carry it on apart. Let that be the plea."

"You take it coolly, James."

A strange expression—a *wrong* expression—passed over the face of James Hunter. "I cannot help myself, Henry. The five thousand pounds are gone, and of course it is right that I should bear the loss alone—or any other loss it may bring in its train."

"But why not impart to me the facts?"

"No. It could not possibly do good; and it might make matters infinitely worse. One advantage our separation will have; there is a great deal of money owing to us from different quarters, and this will call it in."

"Or I don't see how you would carry anything on for your part, minus your five thousand pounds," retorted Mr. Henry, in a spirit of satire.

"Will you grant me a favour, Henry?"

"That depends upon what it may be."

"Let the real grounds of our separation—this miserable affair that has led to it—be equally a secret from your wife, as from the world. I should not ask it without an urgent reason."

"Don't you mean to tell Louisa?"

"No. The matter is one entirely my own; I do not wish to talk of it even to my wife. Will you give me the promise?"

"Very well. If it be of the consequence you seem to intimate. I cannot fathom you, James."

"Let us apply ourselves now to the ways and means of the dissolution. That, at any rate, may be amicable."

It was quite evident that he fully declined further allusion to the subject. And Mr.

Henry Hunter obtained no better elucidation, then or later.

It fell upon the world like a thunderbolt—that is, the world connected with Hunter and Hunter. *They* separate? so flourishing a firm as that? The world at first refused to believe it; but the world soon found it was true.

Mr. Hunter retained the yard where the business was at present carried on. Mr. Henry Hunter found other premises to suit him: not far off: a little more to the west. Considerably surprised were Mrs. Hunter and Mrs. Henry Hunter; but the same plausible excuse was given to them; and they were left in ignorance of the true cause.

“Will you remain with me?” pointedly asked Mr. Hunter of Austin Clay. “I particularly wish it.”

“As you and Mr. Henry may decide, sir,” was the reply given. “It is not for me to choose.”

“We could both do with you, I believe. I had better talk it over with him.”

“That will be the best plan, sir.”

"What do you part for?" abruptly inquired Dr. Bevary one day of the two brothers, coming into the counting-house and catching them together.

Mr. Henry raised his eyebrows. Mr. Hunter spoke volubly.

"The business is getting too large. It will be better divided."

"Moonshine!" cried the doctor, quietly. "That's what you have been cramming your wives with; it won't do for me. When a concern gets unwieldy, a man takes a partner to help him on with it: *you* are separating. There's many a firm larger than yours. Do you remember the proverb of the bundle of sticks?"

But neither Dr. Bevary nor anybody else got at a better reason than that for the measure. The dissolution of partnership took place; it was duly gazetted and the old firm became two. Austin remained with Mr. Hunter, and he was the only living being who gave a guess, or who could give a guess, at the real cause of separation—the drawing out of that five thousand pounds.

And yet—it was not the drawing out of that first five thousand pounds, that finally decided Mr. Henry Hunter to enforce the step, so much as the thought that other thousands might perhaps be following it. He could not divest his mind of the fear.

## PART THE SECOND.

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### CHAPTER I.

#### A MEETING OF THE WORKMEN.

FOR several years after the separation of Hunter and Hunter, things went on smoothly: at least there was no event sufficiently marked that we need linger to trace it. Each had a flourishing business, though Mr. Hunter had some difficulty in staving off embarrassment in the financial department: a fact which was well known to Austin Clay, who was now confidential manager—head of all, under Mr. Hunter.

He, Austin Clay, was getting towards thirty years of age. He enjoyed a handsome salary, and was putting by money yearly. He still remained at Peter Quale's, though his position would have warranted

a style of living far superior. Not that it could have brought him more respect: of that, he enjoyed a full share, both from master and men. Clever, energetic, firm, and friendly, he was thoroughly fitted for his post—was liked and esteemed. But for him, Mr. Hunter's business might not have been what it was, and Mr. Hunter knew it. *He* was a broken-spirited man, little capable now of devoting energy to anything. The years, in their progress, had terribly altered James Hunter.

A hot evening in Daffodil's Delight; and Daffodil's Delight was making it a busy one. Uninterrupted prosperity is sometimes nearly allied to danger: or, rather, danger may grow out of it. Prosperity begets independence, and independence often begets assumption—very often, a selfish, wrong view of surrounding things. If any workmen had enjoyed of late years (it may be said) unlimited prosperity, they were those connected with the building trade. Therefore, being so flourishing, it struck some of their body, who in a degree gave laws to the

rest, that the best thing they could do was to make themselves more flourishing still. As a preliminary, they began to agitate for an increase of wages: this was to be accomplished by reducing the hours of labour, the proposition being to work nine hours per day instead of ten. They said nothing about relinquishing the wages of the extra hour: they would be paid for ten hours, and work nine. The proposition was first put by the men of a leading metropolitan firm to their principals, and, failing to obtain it, they threatened to strike. This it was that was just now agitating Daffodil's Delight.

In the front room of one of the houses that abutted nearly on the gutter, and to which you must ascend by steps, there might be read in the window, inscribed on a piece of paper, the following notice: "The Misses Dunn's, Milliner and Dressmakers. Ladies own materiels made up." The composition of the *affiche* was that of the two Miss Dunns jointly, who prided themselves upon being elegant scholars. A twelvemonth's apprenticeship had initiated

them into the mysteries of dressmaking ; millinery had come to them, as Mark Tapley would say, spontaneous, or by dint of practice. They had set up for themselves in their father's house, and could boast of a fair share of the patronage of Daffodil's Delight. Showy damsels were they, with good-humoured turned-up noses, and light hair ; much given to gadding and gossiping, and fonder of dressing themselves than of getting home the dresses of their customers.

On the above evening, they sat in their room, an upper one, stitching away. A gown was in progress for Mrs. Quale, who often boasted that she could do any work in the world, save make her own gowns. It had been in progress for two weeks, and that lady had at length come up in a temper, as Miss Jemima Dunn expressed it, and had demanded it to be returned, done or undone. They, with much depreciation, protested it should be home the first thing in the morning, and went to work. Four or five visitors, girls of their

own age, were performing the part of lookers-on, and much laughter prevailed.

"I say," cried out Martha White—a pleasant-looking girl, who had perched herself aloft on the edge of a piece of furniture, which appeared to be a low chest of drawers by day, and turned itself into a bed at night—"Mary Baxendale was crying yesterday, because of the strike ; saying, it would be bad for all of us, if it came. Ain't she a soft ?"

"Baxendale's again it, too," exclaimed Miss Ryan, Pat Ryan's eldest trouble. "Father says he don't think Baxendale 'll go in for it at all."

"Mary Baxendale's just one of them timid things as is afraid of their own shadders," cried Mary Ann Dunn. "If she saw a cow a-coming at the other end of the street, she'd turn tail and run. Jemimer, whatever are you at ? The sleeves is to be in plaits, not gathers."

"She do look ill, though, does Mary Baxendale," said Jemima, after some attention to the sleeve in hand. "It's my

belief she'll never live to see Christmas ; she's going the way her mother went. Won't it be prime, when the men get ten hours' pay for nine hours' work ? I shall think about getting married then."

" You must find somebody to have you first," quoth Grace Darby. " You have not got a sweetheart yet."

Miss Jemima tossed her head. " I needn't to wait long for that. The chaps be as plentiful as sprats in winter. All you have got to do is to pick and choose."

" What's that ?" interrupted Mrs. Dunn, darting into the room, with her sharp tongue and her dirty fine cap. " What's that as you're talking about, miss ?"

" We are a-talking of the strike," responded Jemima, with a covert glance to the rest. " Martha White and Judy Ryan says the Baxendales won't go in for it."

" Not go in for it ? what idiots they must be !" returned Mrs. Dunn, the attractive subject completely diverting her attention from Miss Jemima and her words. " Ain't nine hours a-day enough for the men to be

at work? I can tell the Baxendales what—when we have got the nine hours all straight and sure, we shall next demand eight. Taint free-born Englishers as is going to be put upon. It'll be glorious times, girls, won't it? We shall get a taste o' fowls and salmon, may be, for dinner then!"

"My father says he does not think the masters will come-to, if the men do strike," observed Grace Darby.

"Of course they won't—till they are forced," retorted Mrs. Dunn, in a spirit of satire. "But that's just what they are a-going to be. Don't you be a fool, Grace Darby!"

Lotty Cheek rushed in, a girl with a tongue almost as voluble as Mrs. Dunn's, and rough hair, the colour of a tow-rope. "What d'ye think?" cried she, breathlessly. "There's a-going to be a meeting of the men to-night in the big room of the Bricklayers' Arms. They are a-filing in now. I think it must be about the strike."

"D'ye suppose it would be about anything else ?" retorted Mrs. Dunn. "I'd like to be one of 'em ! I'd hold out for the day's work of eight hours, instead of nine, I would. So 'ud they, if they was men."

Mrs. Dunn's speech was concluded to an empty room. All the girls had flown down into the street, leaving the parts of Mrs. Quale's gown in closer contact with the dusty floor than was altogether to their benefit.

The agitation in the trade had hitherto been chiefly smouldering in an under-current : now, it was rising to the surface. Lotty Cheek's inference was right ; the meeting of this evening had reference to the strike. It had been hastily arranged in the day ; was quite an informal sort of affair, and confined to the operatives of Mr. Hunter.

Not in a workman's jacket, but in a brown coat dangling to his heels, with a slit down the back and ventilating holes for the elbows, first entered he who had been chiefly instrumental in calling the meeting.

It was Mr. Samuel Shuck ; better known, you may remember, as Slippery Sam. Somehow, Sam and prosperity could not contrive to pull together in the same boat. He was one of those who like to live on the fat of the land, but are too lazy to work for their share of it. And how Sam had contrived to exist until now, and keep himself and his large family out of the workhouse, was a marvel to all. In his fits of repentance, he would manage to get in again at one or other of the yards of the Messrs. Hunter ; but they were growing tired of him.

The room at the Bricklayers' Arms was tolerably commodious, and Sam took up a conspicuous position in it.

"Well," began Sam, when the company had assembled, and were furnished with pipes and pewter-pots, "you have heard that that firm won't accept the reduction in the hours of labour, so the men have determined on a strike. Now, I have got a question to put to you. Is there most power in one man, or in a few dozens of men ?"

Some laughed, and said, "In the dozens."

"Very good," glibly went on Sam, whose tongue was smoother than oil, and who was gifted with a sort of oratory and some learning when he chose to put it out.

"Then, the measure I wish to urge upon you is, make common cause with those men; we are not all obliged to strike at the same time; it will be better not; but by degrees. Let every firm in London strike, each at its appointed time," he continued, raising his voice to vehemence.

"We must stand up for ourselves; for our rights; for our wives and children. By making common cause together, we shall bowl out the masters, and bring them to terms."

"Hooroar!" put in Pat Ryan.

"Hooroar!" echoed a few more.

An aged man, Abel White's father, usually called old White, who was past work, and had a seat at his son's chimney corner, leaned forward and spoke, his voice tremulous, but distinct. "Samuel Shuck, did you ever know strikes do any good, either

to the men or the masters ? Friends," he added, turning his venerable head around, "I am in my eightieth year ; and I picked up some experience while them eighty years was passing. Strikes have ruined some masters, in means ; but they have ruined men wholesale, in means, in body, and in soul."

"Hold there!" cried Sam Shuck, who had not brooked the interruption patiently. "Just tell us, old White, before you go on, whether coercion answers for British workmen ?"

"It does not," replied the old man, lifting his quiet voice to firmness. "But perhaps you will tell me in your turn, Sam Shuck, whether it's likely to answer for masters ?"

"It *has* answered for them," returned Sam, in a tone of irony. "I *have* heard of back strikes, where the masters were coerced and coerced, till the men got all they stood out for."

"And so brought down ruin on their own heads," returned the old man, shaking

his. "Did you ever hear of a lock-out, Shuck ? "

"Ay, ay," interposed quiet, respectable Robert Darby. "Did you ever hear of that, Slippery Sam ? "

Slippery Sam growled. "Let the masters lock-out if they dare ! Let 'em. The men would hold out to the death."

"And death it will be, with some of us, if the strike comes, and lasts. I came down here to-night, on my son's arm, just for your good, my friends, not for mine. At your age, I thought as some of you do ; but I have learnt experience now. I can't last long, any way ; and it's little matter to me whether famine from a strike be my end, or——"

"Famine !" derisively retorted Slippery Sam.

"Yes, famine," was the quiet answer. "Strikes never yet brought nothing but misery in the end. Let me urge upon you all not to be led away. My voice is but a feeble one ; but I think the Lord is sometimes pleased to show out things clearly to

the aged, almost as with a gift of prophecy ; and I could only come and beseech you to keep upon the straight-forward path. Don't have anything to do with a strike ; keep it away from you at arm's length, as you would keep away the evil one."

"What's the good of listening to him ?" cried Slippery Sam, in anger. "He is in his dotage."

"Will you listen to me, then ?" spoke up Peter Quale ; "I am not in mine. I didn't intend to come here, as may be guessed ; but when I found so many of you bending your steps this way to listen to Slippery Sam, I thought it time to change my mind, and come and tell you what *I* thought of strikes."

"*You !*" rudely replied Slippery Sam. "A fellow like you, always in full work, earning the biggest wages, is sure not to favour strikes. You can't be much better off than you are."

"That admission of yours is worth something, Slippery Sam, if there's any here have got the sense to see it," nodded Peter

Quale. "Good workmen, on full wages, *don't* favour strikes. I have rose up to what I am by sticking to my work patiently, and getting on step by step. It's open to every living man to get on as I have done, if he have got skill and pluck to work. But if I had done as you do, Sam, gone in for labour one day and for play two, and for drinking, and strikes, and rebellion, because money, which I was too lazy to work for, didn't drop from the skies into my hands, then I should just have been where you be."

"Is it right to keep a man grinding and sweating his life out for ten hours a-day?" retorted Sam. "The masters would be as well off if we worked nine, and the surplus men would find employment."

"It isn't much of your life that you sweat out, Sam Shuck," rejoined Peter Quale, with a cough that especially provoked his antagonist. "And, as to the masters being as well off, you had better ask them about that. Perhaps they'd tell you that to pay ten hours' wages for nine hours' work would

be the hour's wage dead loss to their pockets."

"Are you rascal enough to go in for the masters?" demanded Sam, in a fiery heat.  
"Who'd do that, but a traitor?"

"I go in for myself, Sam," equably responded Peter Quale. "I know on which side my bread's buttered. No skilful workmen, possessed of prudent thought and judgment, ever yet went blindfold into a strike. At least, not many such."

Up rose Robert Darby. "I'd just say a word, if I can get my meaning out, but I'm not cute with the tongue. It seems to me, mates, that it would be a great boon if we could obtain the granting of the nine hours' movement; and perhaps in the end it would not affect the masters, for they'd get it out of the public. I'd agitate for this in a peaceful way, in the shape of reason and argument, and do my best in that way to get it. But I'd not like, as Peter Quale says, to plunge blindfold into a strike."

"I look at it in this light, Darby," said

Peter Quale, "and it seems to me it's the only light as 'll answer to look at it in. Things in this world are estimated by comparison. There ain't nothing large nor small *in itself*. I may say, this chair's big : well, so it is, if you match it by that there bit of a stool in the chimbley corner ; but it's very small if you put it by the side of a omnibus, or of one of the sheds in our yard. Now, if you compare our wages with those of workmen in most other trades, they are large. Look at a farm labourer, poor fellow, with his ten shillings (more or less) a-week, hardly keeping body and soul together. Look at what a man earns in the malting districts in the country ; fifteen shillings and his beer, is reckoned good wages. Look at a policeman, with his pound a-week. Look at a postman. Look at ——"

"Look at ourselves," intemperately interrupted Jim Dunn. "What's other folks to us ? We work hard, and we ought to be paid according."

"So I think we are," said Peter Quale.

"Thirty-three shillings is *not* bad wages, and it is only a delusion to say it is. Neither is ten hours a day an unfair or oppressive time to work. I'd be as glad anybody to have the hour took off, if it could be done pleasantly ; but I am not going to put myself out of work and into trouble to stand out for it. It's a thing that I convinced the masters never will give ; and if Pollock's men strike for it, they'll do it against their own interests——"

Hisses and murmurs of disapprobation from various parts of the room interrupted Peter Quale.

" You'd better wait and understand, afore you begin to hiss," phlegmatically recommended Peter Quale, when the noise had subsided. " I say it will be against their interests to strike, because, I think, if they stop on strike for twelve months, they'll be no nearer getting their end. I may be wrong, but that's my opinion. There's always two sides to a question—our own, and the opposite one ; and the great fault in most folks is, that they look only at thei

own side, and it causes them to see things in a partial view. I have looked as fair as I can at our own side, trying to put away my bias *for it*; and I have put myself in thought on the masters' side, asking myself, what would *I* do, were I one of them. Thus I have tried to judge between them and us, and the conclusion I have drawed is, that they won't give in."

"The masters have been brought to grant demands more unreasonable than this," rejoined Sam Shuck. "If you know anything about back strikes, you must know that, Quale."

"And that's one of the reasons why I argue they won't grant this," said Peter. "If they go on granting and granting, they may get asking themselves where the demands 'll stop."

"Let us go back to 1833," spoke up old White again, and the man's age and venerable aspect caused him to be listened to with respect. "I was then working in Manchester, and belonged to the Trades' Union: a powerful Union as ever was

formed. In our strength, we thought we should like a thing or two altered, and we made a formal demand upon the master builders, requiring them to discontinue the erection of buildings on sub-contracts. The masters fell in with it. You'll understand, friends," he broke off to say, "that, looking at things now, and looking at 'em then, is just as if I saw 'em in two opposite aspects. Next, we gave out a set of various rules for the masters, and required them to abide by such—about the making of the wages equal; the number of apprentices they should take; the machinery they should or should not use; and other things. Well, the masters gave us that also, and it put us all cock-a-hoop, and we went on to dictate to 'em more and more. If they—the masters—broke any of our rules, we levied fines on 'em, and made 'em pay up; we ordered them before us at our meetings, found fault with 'em, commanded 'em to obey us, to take on such men as we pointed out, and to turn off others; in short, forced 'em to do as we chose. People might have thought that we

was the masters and they the operatives.  
Pretty well that, wasn't it?"

The room nodded acquiescence. Slippery Sam snapped his fingers in delight.

"The worst was, it did not last," resumed the old man. "Like too many other folks emboldened with success, we wasn't content to let well alone, but went on a bit too far. The masters took up their own defence at last ; and the wonder to me now, looking back, is, that they didn't do it before. They formed themselves into a Union, and passed a resolve to employ no man unless he signed a pledge not to belong to a Trades' Union. Then we all turned out. Six months the strike was on, and the buildings was at a standstill, and us out of work."

"Were wages bad at that time ?" inquired Robert Darby.

"No. The good workmen among us had been earning in the summer thirty-five shillings a week ; and the bricklayers had just had a rise of three shillings. We was just fools : that's my opinion of it now. Awful

misery we were reduced to. Every stick we had, went to the pawn shop ; our wives was skin and bone, our children was in rags ; and some of us just laid our heads down on the stones, clammed to death."

"What was the trade in other places about, that it didn't help you ?" indignantly demanded Sam Shuck.

"They did help us. Money to the tune of eighteen thousand pounds came to us ; but we was a large body—many mouths to feed, and the strike was prolonged. We had to come-to at last, for the masters wouldn't ; and we voted our combination a nuisance, and went humbly to 'em, like dogs with their tails between their legs, and craved to be took on again upon their own terms. But we couldn't get took back ; not all of us : the masters had learnt a lesson. They had got machinery to work, and had collected workmen from other parts, so that we was not wanted. And that's all the good the strike brought to us ! I came away on the tramp with my family, and got work in London after a deal of struggle and priva-

"and I make no doubt that both equally deemed themselves to have been so, when they found their senses. The masters' came to them : the men were brought to theirs."

"You speak strongly, sir."

"Because I feel strongly. When I become a master, I shall, if I know anything of myself, have my men's interest at heart ; but none of them shall ever presume to dictate to me. If a master cannot exercise his own authority in firm self-reliance, let him give up business."

"Have masters a right to oppress us, sir ?—to grind us down ?—to work us into our coffins ?" cried Sam Shuck.

The gentleman raised his eyebrows, and a half smile crossed his lips. "Since when have you been oppressed, and ground down into your coffins ?"

Some of the men laughed—at Sam's oily tongue.

"If you *are*—if you have any complaint of that sort to make, let me hear it now, and I will convey it to Mr. Hunter. He is ever ready, you know, to—What do you say,

Shuck? The nine hours' concession is all you want? If you can get the masters to give you ten hours' pay for nine hours' work, so much the better for you. *I* would not: but it is no affair of mine. To be paid what you honestly earn, be it five pounds per week or be it one, is only justice; but to be paid for what you don't earn, is the opposite thing. I think, too, that the equalization of wages is a mistaken system, quite wrong in principle: one which can bring only discontent in the long run. Let me repeat that with emphasis—the equalization of wages, should it ever take place, can bring only discontent in the long run."

There was a pause. No one spoke, and the speaker resumed—

"I conclude you have met here to discuss this agitation at the Messrs. Pollocks?"

"Pollocks' men are a-going to strike," said Slippery Sam.

"Oh, they are, are they?" returned the gentleman, some mockery in his tone. "I hope they may find it to their benefit. I

don't know what the Messrs. Pollocks may do in the matter: but I know what I should."

" You'd hold out to the last against the men ? "

" I should ; to the last and the last : were it for ten years to come. Force a measure upon *me !* coerce *me !*" he reiterated, drawing his fine form to its full height, while the red flush mantled in his cheeks. " No, my men, I am not made of that yielding stuff. Only let me be persuaded that my judgment is right, and no body of men on earth should force me to act against it."

The speaker was Austin Clay, as I daresay you have already guessed. He had not gone to the meeting to interrupt it or to take part in it, but in search of Peter Quale. Hearing from Mrs. Quale that her husband was at the Bricklayers' Arms—a rare occurrence, for Peter was not one who favoured public-houses—Austin went thither in search of him, and so found himself in the midst of the meeting. His business with Peter related to certain orders he required to give

for the early morning. Once there, however, the temptation to have his say was too great to be resisted. That over, he went out, making a sign to the man to follow him.

"What are those men about to rush into, Quale?" he demanded, when his own matter was over.

"Ah, what indeed?" returned the man. "If they do get led into a strike, they'll repent it, some of them."

"You are not one of the malcontents, then?"

"I?" retorted Peter, utter scorn in his tone. "No, sir. There's a proverb which I learnt years ago from an old book as was lent me, and I've not forgotten it, sir—'Let well alone.' But you must not think all the men you saw sitting there be discontented agitators, Mr. Clay. It's only Shuck and a few of that stamp. The rest be as steady and cautious as I am."

"If they don't get led away," replied Austin Clay, and his voice betrayed a dubious tone. "Slippery Sam, in spite of his loose qualifications, is a ringleader more

persuasive than prudent. Hark! he is at it again, hammer and tongs. Are you going back to them?"

"No, sir. I shall go home now."

"We will walk together, then," observed Austin. "Afterwards I am going on to Mr. Hunter's." \*

\* "It need scarcely be remarked, that Sam Shuck and his followers represent only the ignorant and unprincipled section of those who engage in strikes. Working men are perfectly right in combining to seek the best terms they can get, both as to wages and time; provided there be no interference with the liberty either of masters or fellow-workmen.—*Ed.* L. H., February, 1862."

## CHAPTER II.

### CALLED TO KETTERFORD.

AUSTIN CLAY was not mistaken. Rid of Peter Quale, who was a worse enemy of Sam's schemes than even old White, Sam had it nearly his own way, and went at it "hammer and tongs." He poured his eloquent words into the men's ears—and Sam, as you have heard, really did possess the gift of eloquence : of a rough and rude sort : but that tells well with the class, now gathered round him. He brought forth argument upon argument, fallacious as they were plausible ; he told the men it depended upon *them*, whether the boon they were standing out for should be accorded, not upon the masters. Not that Sam called it a boon ; he spoke of it as a *right*. Let them only be firm and true to themselves, he said,

and the masters must give in : there was no help for it, they would have no other resource. Sam finally concluded by demanding, with fierce looks all round, whether they were men, or whether they were slaves, and the men answered, with a cheer and a shout, that Britons never should be slaves ; and the meeting broke up in excitement and glorious spirits, and went home elated, some with the anticipation of the fine time that was dawning for them, others with having consumed a little too much half-and-half.

Slippery Sam reeled away to his home. A dozen or so attended him, listening to his oratory, which was continued still : though not exactly to the gratification of Daffodil's Delight, who were hushing their unruly babies to sleep, or striving to get to sleep themselves. Much Sam cared whom he disturbed ! He went along, flinging his arms and his words at random—inflammatory words, carrying poisoned shafts that told. If somebody came down upon you and upon me, telling us that, with a little exertion on our part, we should inevitably drop into a

thousand a year, and showing plausible cause for the same, should we turn a deaf ear? The men shook hands individually with Slippery Sam, and left him propped against his own door; for Sam, with all deference be it spoken, was a little overcome himself—with the talking, of course.

Sam's better half greeted him with a shrill tongue: she and Mrs. Dunn might be paired in that respect: and Sam's children, some in the bed in the corner, some sitting up, greeted him with a shrill cry also, clamouring for a very common-place article, indeed—"some *bread!*" Sam's family seemed inconveniently to increase; for the less there appeared to be to welcome them with, the surer and faster they arrived. Thirteen, Sam could number now; but several of the elder ones were out in the world "doing for themselves"—getting on, or starving, as it might happen to be.

"You old sot! you have been at that drinking-can again," were Mrs. Sam's words of salutation; and I wish I could soften them down to refinement for polite ears;

but if you are to have the truth, you must take them as they were spoken.

"Drinking-can!" echoed Sam, who was in too high glee to lose his temper, "never mind the drinking-can, missis: my fortian's made. I drawed together that meeting, as I telled ye I should," he added, discarding his scholarly eloquence for the familiar home phraseology, "and they come to it, every man jack on 'em, save thin-skinned Baxendale up-stairs. Never was such a full meeting knowed in Daffodil's Delight."

"Who cares for the meeting!" irascibly responded Mrs. Sam. "What we wants, is some'at to fill our insides with. Don't come bothering home here about a meeting, when the children be a starving. If you'd work more and talk less, it 'ud become ye better."

"I got the ear of the meeting," said Sam, braving the reproof with a provoking wink. "A despicable set our men is, at Hunter's, a humdrumming on like slaves for ever, taking their paltry wages and making no stir. But I've put the brand among 'em at last, and sent 'em home all on fire, to dream of short

work and good pay. Quale, he come, and put in his spoke again' it ; and that wretched old skeleton of a White, what's been cheating the grave this ten year, he come, and put in his ; and Mr. Austin Clay, he must thrust his nose among us, and talk treason to the men : but I think my tongue have circumvented the lot. If it haven't, my name's not Sam Shuck."

" If you and your circumventions and your tongue was all at the bottom of the Thames, 'twouldn't be no loss, for all the good they does above it," sobbed Mrs. Shuck, whose anger generally ended in tears. " Here's me and the children a clemming for want o' bread, and you can waste your time over a idle good-for-nothing meeting. Ain't you ashamed, not to work as other men do ?"

" Bread ! " loftily returned Sam, with the air of a king, "'tisn't bread I shall soon be furnishing for you and the children : it's mutton chops. My fortian's made, I say."

" Yah ! " retorted Mrs. Sam. " It have been made forty times in the last ten year, to listen to you. What good has ever come

of the boast? I'd shut up my mouth if I couldn't talk sense."

Sam nodded his head oracularly, and entered upon an explanation. But for the fact of his being a little "overcome"—whatever may have been its cause—he would have been more guarded. "I've had overtures," he said, bending forward his head and lowering his voice, "and them overtures, which I accepted, will be the making of you and of me. Work!" he exclaimed, throwing his arms gracefully from him with a repelling gesture, "I've done with work now; I'm superior to it; I'm exalted far above that lowering sort of toil. The leaders among the London Trade Union have recognised eloquence, ma'am, let me tell you; and they've made me one of their picked body—appointed me agitator to the firms of Hunter. 'You get the meeting together, and prime 'em with the best of your eloquence, and excite 'em to recognise and agitate for their own rights, and you shall have your appointment, and a good round weekly salary.' Well, Mrs. S., I did it. I

got the men together, and I *have* primed 'em, and some of 'em's a busting to go off; and all I've got to do from henceforth is to keep 'em up to the mark, by means of that tongue which you are so fond of disparaging, and to live like a gentleman. There's a trifling instalment of the first week's money."

Sam threw a sovereign on the table. Mrs. Shuck, with a grunt of disparagement still, darted forward to seize upon it through her tears. The children, uttering a wild shriek of wonder, delight, and disbelief, born of incipient famine, darted forward to seize it too. Sam burst into a fit of laughter, threw himself back to indulge it, and not being just then over steady on his legs, lost his equilibrium, and toppled over the fender into the ashes.

Leaving Mrs. Shuck to pick him up, or to leave him there—which latter negative course was the one she would probably take—let us return to Austin Clay.

At Peter Quale's gate he was standing a moment to speak to the man before proceed-

ing onwards, when Mrs. Quale came running down the garden path.

"I was coming in search of you, sir," she said to Austin Clay. "This has just been brought, and the man made me sign my name to a paper."

Austin took what she held out to him—a telegraphic despatch. He opened it; read it; then, in the prompt, decisive manner usual with him, requested Mrs. Quale to put him up a change of things in his portmanteau, which he would return for; and walked away with a rapid step.

"Whatever news is it that he has had?" cried Mrs. Quale, as she stood with her husband, looking after him. "Where can he have been summoned to?"

"Taint no business of ours," retorted Peter; "if it had been, he'd have enlightened us. Did you ever hear of that offer that's always pending?—Five hundred a-year to anybody as 'll undertake to mind his own business, and leave other folks's alone."

Austin was on his way to Mr. Hunter's.

A very frequent evening visitor there now, was he. But this evening he had an ostensible motive for going ; a boon to crave. That alone may have made his footsteps fleet.

In the soft twilight of the summer evening, in the room of their own house that opened to the conservatory, sat Florence Hunter—no longer the impulsive, charming, and somewhat troublesome child, but the young and lovely woman. Of middle height and graceful form, her face was one of great sweetness ; the earnest, truthful spirit, the pure innocence, which had made its charm in youth, made it now : to look on Florence Hunter, was to love her.

She appeared to be in deep thought, her cheek resting on her hand, and her eyes fixed on vacancy. Some movement in the house aroused her, and she arose, shook her head, as if she would shake care away, and bent over a rare plant in the room's large opening, lightly touching the leaves.

"I fear that mamma is right, and I am rong, pretty plant !" she murmured. "I

fear that you will die. Is it that this London, with its heavy atmosphere——”

The knock of a visitor at the hall door resounded through the house. Did Florence *know* the knock, that her voice should falter, and the soft pink in her cheeks should deepen to a glowing crimson? The room door opened, and a servant announced Mr. Clay.

In that early railway journey when they first met, Florence had taken a predilection for Austin Clay. “I like him so much!” had been her gratuitous announcement to her uncle Henry. The liking had ripened into an attachment, firm and lasting—a child’s attachment: but Florence grew into a woman, and it could not remain such. Thrown much together, the feeling had changed, and love mutually arose: they fell into it unconsciously. Was it quite prudent of Mr. Hunter to sanction, nay, to court the frequent presence at his house of Austin Clay? Did he overlook the obvious fact, that he was one who possessed attractions, both of mind and person, and that Florence was

now a woman grown ? Or did Mr. Hunter deem that the social barrier, which he might assume existed between his daughter and his dependent, would effectually prevent all approach of danger ? Mr. Hunter must himself account for the negligence : no one else can do it. It was certain that he did have Austin very much at his house, but it was equally certain that he never cast a thought to the possibility that his daughter might be learning to love him.

The strange secret, whatever it may have been, attaching to Mr. Hunter, had shattered his health to that extent that for days together he would be unequal to go abroad or to attend to business. Then Austin, who acted as principal in the absence of Mr. Hunter, would arrive at the house when the day was over, to report progress, and take orders for the next day. Or, rather, consult with him what the orders should be ; for in energy, in capability, Austin was now the master spirit, and Mr. Hunter bent to it. That over, he passed the rest of the evening in the society of Florence, conversing with

her freely, confidentially ; on literature, art, the news of the day ; on topics of home interest ; listening to her music, listening to her low voice, as she sang her songs ; guiding her pencil. There they would be. He with his ready eloquence, his fund of information, his attractive manners, and his fine form, handsome in its height and strength ; she with her sweet fascinations, her gentle loveliness. What could be the result ? But, as is almost invariably the case, the last person to give a suspicion to it was he who positively looked on, and might have seen all—Mr. Hunter. Life, in the presence of the other, had become sweet to each as a summer's dream—a dream that had stolen over them ere they knew what it meant. But consciousness came with time.

Very conscious of it were they both as he entered this evening. Austin took her hand in greeting : a hand always tremulous now in his. She bent again over the plant she was tending, her eyelids and her damask cheeks drooping.

“ You are alone, Florence ! ”

"Just now. Mamma is very poorly this evening, and keeps her room. Papa was here a few minutes ago."

He released her hand, and stood looking at her, as she played with the petals of the flower. Not a word had Austin spoken of his love ; not a word was he sure that he might speak. If he partially divined that it might be acceptable to her, he did not believe it would be to Mr. Hunter.

"The plant looks sickly," he observed.

"Yes. It is one that thrives in cold and wind. It came from Scotland. Mamma feared this close London atmosphere would not suit it ; but I said it looked so hardy, it would be sure to do well. Rather than it should die, I would send it back to its bleak home."

"In tears, Florence ! For the sake of a plant !"

"Not for that," she answered, twinkling the moisture from her eyelashes, as she raised them to his with a brave smile. "I was thinking of mamma ; she appears to be fading rapidly, like the plant."

"She may grow stronger when the heat of summer shall have passed."

Florence slightly shook her head, as if she could not share in the suggested hope. "Mamma herself does not seem to think she shall, Austin. She has dropped ominous words more than once latterly. This afternoon I showed her the plant, that it was drooping. 'Ay, my dear,' she remarked, 'it is like me—on the wane.' And I think my uncle Bevary's opinion has become unfavourable."

It was a matter on which Austin could not urge hope, though, for the sake of tranquillizing Florence, he might suggest it, for he believed that Mrs. Hunter was fading rapidly. All these years she seemed to have been getting thinner and weaker; it was some malady connected with the spine, causing her at times great pain. Austin changed the subject.

"I hope Mr. Hunter will soon be in, Florence. I am come to ask for leave of absence."

"Papa is not out; he is sitting with

mamma. That is another reason why I fear danger for her. I think papa sees it ; he is so solicitous for her comfort, so anxious to be with her, as if he would guard her from surprise or agitating topics. He will not suffer a visitor to enter at hazard ; he will not let a note be given her, until he has first seen it."

"But he has long been thus anxious," replied Austin, who was aware that what she spoke of had lasted for years.

"I know. But still, latterly—however, I must hope against hope," broke off Florence. "I think I do : hope is certainly a very strong ingredient in my nature, for I cannot realise the parting with my dear mother. Did you say you have come for leave of absence ? Where is it that you wish to go ? "

"I have had a telegraphic despatch from Ketterford," he replied, taking it from his pocket. "My good old friend, Mrs. Thornimett, is dying, and I must hasten thither with all speed."

"Oh !" uttered Florence, almost reproach-

fully. "And you are wasting the time with me!"

"Not so. The first train that goes there does not start for an hour yet, and I can get to Paddington in half of one. The news has grieved me much. The last time I was at Ketterford—you may remember it—Mrs. Thornimett was so very well, exhibiting no symptoms whatever of decay."

"I remember it," answered Florence. "It is two years ago. You stayed a whole fortnight with her."

"And had a battle with her to get away then," said Austin, smiling with the reminiscence, or with Florence's word "whole"—a suggestive word, spoken in that sense. "She wished me to remain longer. I wonder what illness can have stricken her? It must have been sudden."

"What is the relationship between you?"

"A distant one. She and my mother were second cousins. If I——"

Austin was stopped by the entrance of Mr. Hunter. So changed, so bent and bowed, since you, reader, last saw him! The

stout upright figure had grown thin and stooping, the fine dark hair was grey, the once calm, self-reliant face was worn and haggard. Nor was that all ; there was a constant *restlessness* in his manner and in the turn of his eye, giving a spectator the idea that he lived in a state of ever-present, perpetual fear.

Austin put the telegraphic message in his hand. "It is an inconvenient time, I know, sir, for me to be away, busy as we are, and with this agitation rising amongst the men ; but I cannot help myself. I will return as soon as it is possible."

Mr. Hunter did not hear the words. His eyes had fallen on the word "Ketterford," in the despatch, and that seemed to scare away his senses. His hands shook as he held the paper, and for a few moments he appeared incapable of collected thought, of understanding anything. Austin explained again.

"Oh, yes, yes, it is only—it is Mrs. Thorneimett who is ill, and wants you—I comprehend now." He spoke in an incoherent

manner, and with a sigh of the most intense relief. "I—I—saw the word 'dying,' and it startled me," he proceeded, as if anxious to account for his agitation. "You can go, Austin; you must go. Remain a few days there—a week, if you find it necessary."

"Thank you, sir. I will say farewell now, then."

He shook hands with Mr. Hunter, turned to Florence, and took hers. "Remember me to Mrs. Hunter," he said in a low tone, which, in spite of himself, betrayed its own tenderness, "and tell her I hope to find her better on my return."

A few paces from the house, as he went out, Austin encountered Dr. Bevary. "Is she much worse?" he exclaimed to Austin, in a hasty tone.

"Is who much worse, doctor?"

"Mrs. Hunter. I have just had a message from her."

"Not very much, I fancy. Florence said her mamma was poorly this evening. I am off to Ketterford, doctor, for a few days."

"To Ketterford!" replied Dr. Bevary,

with an emphasis that showed the news had startled him. "What are you going there for? For—for Mr. Hunter?"

"For myself," said Austin. "A good old friend is ill—dying, the message says—and has telegraphed for me."

The physician looked at him searchingly. "Do you speak of Miss Gwinn?"

"I should not call her a friend," replied Austin. "I allude to Mrs. Thornimett."

"A pleasant journey to you, then. And, Clay! steer clear of those Gwinns; they would bring you no good."

It was in the dawn of the early morning that Austin entered Ketterford. He did not let the grass grow under his feet between the railway terminus and Mrs. Thornimett's; though he was somewhat dubious about disturbing the house. If she was really "dying," it might be well that he should do so; if only suffering from a severe illness, it might not be expected of him; and the wording of the message had been ambiguous, leaving it an open question. As he drew within view of the house, however, it exhibited signs of

bustle ; lights, not yet put out in the dawn, might be discerned through some of the curtained windows, and a woman, having much the appearance of a nurse, was coming out at the door, halting on the threshold a moment to hold converse with one within.

"Can you tell me how Mrs. Thronimett is ?" inquired Austin, addressing himself to her.

The woman shook her head. "She is gone, sir. Not more than an hour ago."

Sarah, the old servant whom we have seen before at Mrs. Thronimett's, came forward, weeping. "Oh, Mr. Austin ! oh, sir ; why could not you get here sooner ?"

"How could I, Sarah ?" was his reply. "I received the message only last evening, and came off by the first train that started."

"I'd have took a engine to myself, and rode upon its chimbley, but what I'd have got here in time," retorted Sarah. "Twice in the very last half hour of her life, she asked after you. 'Isn't Austin come ?' 'Isn't he yet come ?' My dear old mistress !"

"Why was I not sent for before?" he asked, in return.

"Because we never thought it was turning serious," sobbed Sarah. "She caught cold some days ago, and it flew to her throat, or her chest, I hardly know which. The doctor was called in; and it's my belief *he* didn't know: the doctors now-a-days bain't worth half what they'd used to be, and they call things by fine names that nobody can understand. However it may have been, nobody saw any danger, neither him nor us. But at mid-day yesterday there was a change, and the doctor said he'd like further advice to be brought in. And it was had; but they could not do her any good; and she, poor dear mistress, was the first to say that she was dying. 'Send for Austin,' she said to me; and one of the gentlemen he went to the wire telegraph place, and wrote the message."

Austin made no rejoinder: he seemed to be swallowing down a lump in his throat. Sarah resumed. "Will you see her, sir? She is just laid out."

He nodded acquiescence, and the servant led the way to the death chamber. It had been put straight, so to remain until all that was left of its many years' occupant should be removed. She lay on the bed in placid stillness ; her eyes closed, her pale face calm, a smile upon it ; the calm of a spirit at peace with heaven. Austin leaned over her, losing himself in solemn thoughts. Whither had the spirit flown ? to what bright unknown world ? Had it found the company of sister spirits ? had it seen, face to face, its loving Saviour ? Oh ! what mattered now the few fleeting trials of this life that had passed over her ! how worse than unimportant did they seem by the side of death ! A little, more or less, of care ; a lot, where shade or sunshine shall have predominated ; a few friends gained or lost ; struggle, toil, hope—all must merge in the last rest. It was over ; earth, with its troubles and its petty cares, with its joys and sorrows, and its "goods stored up for many years ;" as completely over for Mary Thornimett, as though it had never been.

In the higher realms whither her spirit had hastened—

“I told Mrs. Dubbs to knock up the undertaker, and desire him to come here at once and take the measure for the coffin.”

Sarah's interruption recalled Austin to the world. It is impossible, even in a death-chamber, to run away from the ordinary duties of daily life.

## CHAPTER III.

### TWO THOUSAND POUNDS.

“ You will stay for the funeral, Mr. Clay?”

“ It is my intention to do so.”

“ Good. Being interested in the will, it may be agreeable to you to hear it read.”

“ Am I interested ?” inquired Austin, in some surprise.

“ Why, of course you are,” replied Mr. Knapley, the legal gentleman with whom Austin was speaking, and who had the conduct of Mrs. Thornimett’s affairs. “ Did you never know that you were a considerable legatee ?”

“ I did not,” said Austin. “ Some years ago—it was at the death of Mr. Thornimett —Mrs. Thornimett hinted to me that I might be the better sometime for a trifle from her. But she has never alluded to it since : and I have not reckoned upon it.”

"Then I can tell you—though it is revealing secrets beforehand—that you are the better to the tune of two thousand pounds."

"Two thousand pounds!" uttered Austin, in sheer amazement. "How came she to leave me so much as that?"

"Do you quarrel with it, young sir?"

"No, indeed: I feel all possible gratitude. But I am surprised, nevertheless."

"She was a clever, clear-sighted woman, was Mrs. Thornimett," observed the lawyer. "I'll tell you about it—how it is you come to have so much. When I was taking directions for Mr. Thornimett's will—more than ten years back now—a discussion arose between him and his wife as to the propriety of leaving a sum of money to Austin Clay. A thousand pounds was the amount named. Mr. Thornimett was for leaving you in his wife's hands, to let her bequeath it to you at her death; Mrs. Thornimett wished it should be left to you then, in the will I was about to make, that you might inherit it on the demise of Mr. Thornimett. He took his own course, and did *not* leave it, as you are aware."

"I did not expect him to leave me anything," interrupted Austin.

"My young friend, if you break in with these remarks, I shall not get to the end of my story. After her husband's burial, Mrs. Thornimett spoke to me. 'I particularly wished the thousand pounds left now to Austin Clay,' she said, 'and I shall appropriate it to him at once.' 'Appropriate it in what manner?' I asked her. 'I should like to put it out to interest, that it may be accumulating for him,' she replied, 'so that at my death he may receive both principal and interest.' 'Then, if you live as long as it is to be hoped you will, madam, you may be bequeathing him two thousand pounds instead of one,' I observed to her. 'Mr. Knapley,' was her answer, 'if I choose to bequeath him three, it is my own money that I do it with; and I am responsible to no one.' She had taken my remark to be one of remonstrance, you see, in which spirit it was not made: had Mrs. Thornimett chosen to leave you the whole of her money she had been welcome to do it for me. 'Can

you help me to a safe investment for him ?' she resumed ; and I promised to look about for it. The long and the short of it is, Mr. Clay, that I found both a safe and a profitable investment, and the one thousand pounds *has* swollen itself into two—as you will hear when the will is read."

"I am truly obliged for her kindness, and for the trouble you have taken," exclaimed Austin, with a glowing colour. "I never thought to get rich all at once."

"You only be prudent and take care of it," said Mr. Knapley. "Be as wise in its use as I and Mrs. Thornimett have been. It is the best advice I can give you."

"It is good advice, I know, and I thank you for it," warmly responded Austin.

"Ay. I can tell you that less than two thousand pounds has laid the foundation of many a great fortune."

To a young man, whose salary is only two hundred a year, the unexpected accession to two thousand pounds, hard cash, seems like a great fortune. Not that Austin Clay cared so very much for a "great fortune" in itself;

but he certainly did hope to achieve a competency, and to this end he made the best use of the talents bestowed upon him. He was not ambitious to die "worth a million;" he had the rare good sense to know that excess of means cannot bring excess of happiness. The richest man on earth cannot eat two dinners a day, or wear two coats at a time, or sit two thorough-bred horses at once, or sleep on two beds. To some, riches are a source of continual trouble. Unless rightly used, they cannot draw a man to heaven, or help him on his road thither.

Austin Clay's ambition lay in becoming a powerful man of business; such as were the Messrs. Hunter. He would like to have men under him, of whom he should be the master; not to control them with an iron hand, to grind them to the dust, to hold them at a haughty distance, as if they were of one species of humanity and he of another. No; he would hold intact their relative positions of master and servant—none more strictly than he; but he would be their considerate friend, their firm advocate, regardful

ever of their interests as he was of his own. He would like to have capital sufficient for all necessary business operations, that he might fulfil every obligation justly and honourably : so far, money would be welcome to Austin. Very welcome did the two thousand pounds sound in his ears, for they might be the stepping-stone to this. Not to the "great fortune" talked of by Mr. Knapley, who avowed freely his respect for millionaires : he did not care for that. They might also be a stepping-stone to something else—the very thought of which caused his face to glow and his veins to tingle—the winning of Florence Hunter. That he would win her, Austin fully believed now.

On the day previous to the funeral, in walking through the streets of Ketterford, Austin found himself suddenly seized by the shoulder. A window had been thrown open, and a fair arm (to speak with the gallantry due to the sex in general, rather than to that one arm in particular) was pushed out and laid upon him. His captor was Miss Gwinn.

"Come in," she briefly said.

Austin would have been better pleased to avoid her, but as she had thus summarily caught him, there was no help for it: to enter into a battle of contention with *her*, might be productive of neither honour nor profit. He entered her sitting-room, and she motioned him to a chair.

"So you did not intend to call upon me during your stay in Ketterford, Austin Clay?"

"The melancholy occasion on which I am here precludes much visiting," was his guarded reply. "And my sojourn will be a short one."

"Don't be a hypocrite, young man, and use those unmeaning words. 'Melancholy occasion!' What did you care for Mrs. Thornimett, that her death should make you 'melancholy?'"

"Mrs. Thornimett was my dear and valued friend," he returned, with an emotion born of anger. "There are few, living, whom I would not rather have spared. I shall never cease to regret the not having arrived in time to see her before she died."

Miss Gwinn peered at him from her keen eyes, as if seeking to know whether this was false or true. Possibly she decided in favour of the latter, for her face somewhat relaxed its sternness. "What has Dr. Bevary told you of me and of my affairs?" she rejoined, passing abruptly to another subject.

"Not anything," replied Austin. He did not lift his eyes, and a scarlet flush dyed his brow as he spoke; nevertheless it was the strict truth. Miss Gwinn noted the signs of consciousness.

"You can equivocate, I see."

"Pardon me. I have not equivocated to you. Dr. Bevary has disclosed nothing; he has never spoken to me of your affairs. Why should he, Miss Gwinn?"

"Your face told a different tale."

"It did not tell an untruth, at any rate," he said, with some hauteur.

"Do you never see Dr. Bevary?"

"I see him sometimes."

"At the house of Mr. Hunter, I presume. How is *she*?"

Again the flush, whatever may have called

it up, crimsoned Austin Clay's brow. "I do not know of whom you speak," he coldly said.

"Of Mrs. Hunter."

"She is in ill health."

"Ill to be in danger of her life? I hear so."

"It may be. I cannot say."

"Do you know, Austin Clay, that I have a long, long account to settle with you?" she resumed after a pause: "years and years have elapsed since, and I have never called upon you for it. Why should I?" she added, relapsing into a dreamy mood, and speaking to herself rather than to Austin; "the mischief was done, and could not be recalled. I once addressed a brief note to you at the office of the Messrs. Hunter, requesting you to give a letter, inclosed in it, to my brother. Why did you not?"

Austin was silent. He retained only too vivid a remembrance of the fact.

"Why did you not give it him, I ask?"

"I could not give it him, Miss Gwinn. When your letter reached me, your brother

had already been at the office of the Messrs Hunter, and was then on his road back to Ketterford. The inclosure was burnt unopened."

"Ay!" she passionately uttered, throwing her arms upwards in mental pain, as Austin had seen her do in the days gone by, and holding commune with herself, regardless of his presence, "such has been my fate through life. Thwarted, thwarted on all sides. For years and years I had lived but in the hope of finding him; the hope of it kept life in me: and when the time came, and I did find him, and was entering upon my revenge, then this brother of mine, who has been the second bane of my existence, stepped in and reaped the benefit. It was my fault. Why, in my exultation, did I tell him the man was found? Did I not know enough of his avarice, his needs, to have made sure that he would turn it to his own account? Why," she continued, battling with her hands as at some invisible adversary, "was I born with this strong principle of justice within me? Why, because he

stepped in with his false claims and drew gold—a fortune—of the man, did I deem it a reason for dropping *my* revenge?—for letting it rest in abeyance? In abeyance it is still; and its unsatisfied claims are wearing out my heart and my life——”

“Miss Gwinn,” interrupted Austin, at length, “I fancy you forget that I am present. Your family affairs have nothing to do with me, and I would prefer not to hear anything about them. I will wish you good day.”

“True. They have nothing to do with you. I know not why I spoke before you, save that your sight angers me.”

“Why so?” Austin could not forbear asking.

“Because you live on terms of friendship with that man. You are as his right hand in business; you are a welcome guest at his house; you regard and respect the house’s mistress. Boy! but that she has not wilfully injured me; but that she is the sister of Dr. Bevary, I should——”

“I cannot listen to any discussion invol-

ving the name of Hunter," spoke Austin, in a repellant, resolute tone, the colour again flaming in his cheeks. "Allow me to bid you good day."

"Stay," she resumed, in a softer tone, "it is not with you personally that I am angry——"

An interuption came in the person of Lawyer Gwinn. He entered the room without his coat, a pen behind each ear, and a dirty straw hat on his head. It was probably his office attire in warm weather.

"I thought I heard a strange voice. How do you do, Mr. Clay?" he exclaimed with much suavity.

Austin bowed. He said something to the effect that he was on the point of departing, and retreated to the door, bowing his final farewell to Miss Gwinn. Mr. Gwinn followed.

"Ketterford will have to congratulate you, Mr. Clay," he said. "I understand you inherit a very handsome sum from Mrs. Thornimett."

"Indeed!" frigidly replied Austin. "Mrs.

Thornimett's will is not yet read. But Ketterford always knows everybody's business better than its own."

"Look you, my dear Mr. Clay," said the lawyer, holding him by the button-hole. "Should you require a most advantageous investment for your money—one that will turn you in cent. per cent. and no risk—I can help you to one. Should your inheritance be of the value of a thousand pounds, and you would like to double it—as all men, of course, do like—just trust it to me; I have the very thing now open."

Austin shook himself free—rather too much in the manner that he might have shaken himself from a serpent. "Whether my inheritance may be of the value of one thousand pounds or of ten thousand, Mr. Gwinn, I shall not require your services in the disposal of it. Good morning."

The lawyer looked after him as he strode away. "So, you carry it with a high hand to me, do you, my brave gentleman! with your vain person, and your fine clothes, and your imperious manner! Take you care! I

hold your master under my thumb ; I may next hold you ! ”

“ The vile hypocrite ! ” ejaculated Austin to himself, walking all the faster to leave the lawyer’s house behind him. “ She is bad enough, with her hankering after revenge, and her fits of passion ; but she is an angel of light compared to him. Heaven help Mr. Hunter ! It would have been sufficient to have had *her* to fight, but to have *him* ! Ay, heaven help *him* ! ”

“ How d’ye do, Mr. Clay ? ”

Austin returned the nod of the passing acquaintance, and continued his way, his thoughts reverting to Miss Gwinn.

“ Poor thing ! there are times when I pity her ! Incomprehensible as the story is to me, I can feel compassion : for it was a heavy wrong done her, looking at it in the best light. She is not all bad ; but for the wrong, and for her evil temper, she might have been different. There is something good in the hint I gathered now from her lips, if it be true—that she suffered her own revenge to drop into abeyance, because her

brother had pursued Mr. Hunter to drain money from him : she would not go upon him in both ways. Yes, there was something in it both noble and generous, if those terms can ever be applied to——”

“ Austin Clay, I am sure ! How are you ?”

Austin resigned his hand to the new comer, who claimed it. His thoughts could not be his own to-day.

The funeral of Mrs. Thornimett took place. Her mortal remains were laid beside her husband, there to repose peacefully until the last trump shall sound. On the return of the mourners to the house, the will was read, and Austin found himself the undoubted possessor of two thousand pounds. Several little treasures, in the shape of books, drawings, and home knicknacks, were also left to him. He saw after the packing of these, and the day following the funeral he returned to London.

It was evening when he arrived ; and he proceeded without delay to the house of Mr. Hunter—ostensibly to report himself, really to obtain a sight of Florence, for which his

tired heart was yearning. The drawing-room was lighted up, by which he judged that they had friends with them. Mr. Hunter met him in the hall: never did a visitor's knock sound at his door but Mr. Hunter, in his nervous restlessness, strove to watch who it might be that entered. Seeing Austin, his face acquired a shade of brightness, and he came forward with an outstretched hand.

"But you have visitors," Austin said, when greetings were over, and Mr. Hunter was drawing him towards the stairs. He wore deep mourning, but was not in evening dress.

"As if anybody will care for the cut of your coat!" cried Mr. Hunter. "There's Mrs. Hunter wrapped up in a woollen shawl."

The room was gay with light and dress, with many voices and with music. Florence was seated at the piano playing, and singing in a glee with others. Austin, silently greeting those whom he knew as he passed, made his way to Mrs. Hunter. She was wrapped in a warm shawl, as her husband had said; but she appeared better than usual.

"I am so glad to see you looking well," Austin whispered, his earnest tone betraying deep feeling.

"And I am glad to see you here again," she replied, smiling, as she held his hand. "We have missed you, Austin. Yes, I feel better! but it is only a temporary improvement. So you have lost poor Mrs. Thornimett. She died before you could reach her."

"She did," replied Austin, with a grave face. "I wish we could get transported to places, in case of necessity, as quickly as the telegraph brings us news that we are wanted. A senseless and idle wish, you will say; but it would have served me in this case. She asked after me twice in her last half hour."

"Austin," breathed Mrs. Hunter, "was it a happy death-bed? Was she ready to go?"

"Quite, quite," he answered, a look of enthusiasm illuminating his face. "She had been ready long."

"Then we need not mourn for her; rather praise God that she is taken. Oh, Austin, what a happy thing it must be for such to

die! But you are young and hopeful; you cannot understand that, yet."

So, Mrs. Hunter had learnt that great truth! Some years before, she had not so spoken to the wife of John Baxendale, when *she* was waiting in daily expectation of being called on her journey. It had come to her ere her time of trial—as the dying woman had told her it would.

The singing ceased, and in the movement which it occasioned in the room, Austin left Mrs. Hunter's side, and stood within the embrasure of the window, half hidden by the curtains. The air was pleasant on that warm summer night, and Florence, resigning her place at the instrument to some other lady, stole to the window to inhale its freshness. There she saw Austin. She had not heard him enter the room—did not know, in fact, that he was back from Ketterford.

"Oh!" she uttered, in the sudden revulsion of feeling that the sight brought to her, "is it you?"

He quietly took her hands in his, and looked down at her. Had it been to save her

life, she could not have helped betraying emotion.

"Are you glad to see me, Florence?" he softly whispered.

She coloured even to tears. Glad! The time might come when she should be able to tell him so; but that time was not yet.

"Mrs. Hunter is glad of my return," he continued, in the same low tone, sweeter to her ear than all music. "She says I have been missed. Is it so, Florence?"

"And what have you been doing?" asked Florence, not knowing in the least what she said in her confusion, as she left his question unanswered, and drew her hands away from him.

"I have not been doing much, save the seeing a dear old friend laid in the earth. You know that Mrs. Thornimett is dead. She died before I got there."

"Papa told us that. He heard from you two or three times, I think. How you must regret it! But why did they not send for you in time?"

"It was only the last day that danger was

apprehended," replied Austin. "She grew worse suddenly. You cannot think, Florence, how strangely this gaiety"—he half turned to the room—"contrasts with the scenes I have left: the holy calm of her death-chamber, the laying of her in the grave."

"An unwelcome contrast, I am sure it must be."

"It jars on the mind. All events, essentially of the world, let them be ever so necessary or useful, must do so, when contrasted with the solemn scenes of life's close. But how soon we forget those solemn scenes, and live in the world again!"

"Austin," she gently whispered, "I do not like to talk of death. It reminds me of the dread that is ever oppressing me."

"She looks so much better as to surprise me," was his answer, unconscious that it betrayed his undoubted cognisance of the "dread" she spoke of.

"If it would but last!" sighed Florence. "To prolong mamma's life, I think I would sacrifice mine."

"No, you would not, Florence—in mercy to her. If called upon to lose her you would grow reconciled to it ; to do so, is in the order of nature. *She could not spare you.*"

Florence believed that she never could grow reconciled to it : she often wondered *how* she should bear it when the time came. But there rose up before her now, as she spoke with Austin, one cheering promise, "As thy day is, so shall thy strength be."

"What should you say, if I tell you I have come into a fortune ?" resumed Austin, in a lighter tone.

"I should say—But, is it true ?" broke off Florence.

"Not true, as you and Mr. Hunter would count fortunes," smiled Austin ; "but true, as poor I, born without silver spoons in my mouth, and expecting to work hard for all I shall ever possess, have looked upon them. Mrs. Thornimett has behaved to me most kindly, most generously ; she has bequeathed to me two thousand pounds."

"I am delighted to hear it," said Florence,

her glad eyes sparkling. "Never call yourself poor again."

"I cannot call myself rich, as Mr. and Mrs. Hunter compute riches. But, Florence, it may be a stepping-stone to become so."

"A stepping-stone to become what?" demanded Dr. Bevary, breaking in upon the conference.

"Rich," said Austin, turning to the doctor. "I am telling Florence that I have come into some money since I went away."

Mr. Hunter and others were gathering around them, and the conversation became general. "What is that, Clay?" asked Mr. Hunter. "You have come into a fortune, do you say?"

"I said, *not* into a fortune, sir, as those accustomed to fortune would estimate it. That great physician, standing there and listening to me, he would laugh at the sum: I daresay he makes more in six months. But it may prove a stepping-stone to fortune and to—to other desirable things."

"Do not speak so vaguely," cried the doctor, in his quaint fashion. "Define the

'desirable things.' Come! it's my turn now."

"I am not sure that they have taken a sufficiently tangible shape as yet, to be defined," returned Austin, in the same tone. "You might laugh at them for day-dreams."

Unwittingly his eye rested for a moment upon Florence. Did she deem the day-dreams might refer to her, that her eye-lids should droop, and her cheeks turn scarlet? Dr. Bevary noticed both the look and the signs; Mr. Hunter saw neither.

"Day-dreams would be enchanting as an eastern fairy-tale, only that they never get realized," interposed one of the fair guests, with a pretty simper, directed to Austin Clay and his attractions.

"I will realize mine," he returned, rather too confidently, 'Heaven helping me!'

"A better stepping-stone, that help, to rely upon, than the money you have come into," said Dr. Bevary, with one of his peculiar nods.

"True, doctor," replied Austin. "But

may not the money have come from the same helping source? Heaven, you know, vouchsafes to work with humble instruments."

The last few sentences had been interchanged in a low tone. They now passed into the general circle, and the evening went on to its close.

Austin and Dr. Bevary were the last to leave the house. They quitted it together, and the doctor passed his arm within Austin's as they walked on.

"Well," said he, "and what have you been doing at Ketterford?"

"I have told you, doctor. Leaving my dear old friend and relative in her grave; and realising the fact that she has bequeathed to me this money."

"Ah, yes; I heard that," returned the doctor. "You've been seeing friends too, I suppose. Did you happen to meet the Gwinn's?"

"Once. I was passing the house, and Miss Gwinn laid hands upon me from the window, and commanded me in. I got out

again as soon as I could. Her brother made his appearance as I was leaving."

"And what did he say to you?" asked the doctor, in a tone meant to be especially light and careless.

"Nothing: except that he told me if I wanted a safe and profitable investment for the money I had inherited under Mrs. Thornimett's will, he could help me to one. I cut him very short, sir."

"What did *she* say?" resumed Dr. Bevary. "Did she begin upon her family affairs—as she is rather fond of doing?"

"Well," said Austin, his tone quite as careless as the doctor's, "I did not give her the opportunity. Once, when she seemed inclined to do so, I stopped her; telling her that her private affairs were no concern of mine, neither should I listen to them."

"Quite right, my young friend," emphatically spoke the doctor.

Not another word was said until they came to Daffodil's Delight. Here they wished each other good night. The doctor

continued his way to his home, and Austin turned down towards Peter Quale's.

But what could be the matter? Had Daffodil's Delight miscalculated the time, believing it to be day, instead of night? Women leaned out of their windows in night-caps; children had crept from their beds and come forth to tumble into the gutter naked, as some of them literally were; men crowded the doorway of the Bricklayers' Arms, and stood about with pipes and pint pots; all were in a state of rampant excitement. Austin laid hold of the first person who appeared sober enough to listen to him. It happened to be a woman, Mrs. Dunn.

"What is this?" he exclaimed. "Have you all come into a fortune?" the recent conversation at Mr. Hunter's probably helping him to the remark.

"Better nor that," shrieked Mrs. Dunn. "Better nor *that*, a thousand times! We have circumvented the masters, and got our ends, and now we shall just have all we want—roast goose and apple pudding for

dinner, and plenty of beer to wash it down with."

"But what is it that you have got?" pursued Austin, who was completely at sea.

"Got! why, we have got the STRIKE," she replied, in joyful excitement. "Pollocks' men struck to-day. Where have you been, sir, not to have heered on it?"

At that moment a fresh crowd came jostling down Daffodil's Delight, and Austin was parted from the lady. Indeed, she rushed up to the mob to follow in their wake. Many other ladies followed in their wake—half Daffodil's Delight, if one might judge by numbers. Shouting, singing, exulting, dancing; it seemed as if they had, for the nonce, gone mad. Sam Shuck, in his long-tailed coat, ornamented with its holes and its slits, was leading the van, his voice hoarse, his face red, his legs and arms executing a war-dance of exultation. He it was who had got up the excitement and was keeping it up, shouting fiercely: "Hurrah for the work of this day! Rule Britanniar!"

Britons never shall be slaves ! The Strike  
has begun, friends ! H—o—o—o—o—r  
—rah ! Three cheers for the Strike !”

Yes. The Strike had begun.

## CHAPTER IV.

### AGITATION.

THE men of an influential metropolitan building firm had struck, because their employers declined to accede to certain demands, and Daffodil's Delight was, as you have seen, in a high state of excitement, particularly the female part of it. The men said they struck for a diminution in the hours of labour ; the masters told them they struck for an increase of wages. Seeing that the non-contents wanted the hours reduced and *not* the pay, it appears to me that you may call it which you like.

The Messrs. Hunters' men—with whom we have to do, for it was they who chiefly filled Daffodil's Delight—though continuing their work as usual, were in a most unsettled state : as was the case in the trade gene-

rally. The smouldering discontent might have died away peacefully enough, and probably would, but that certain spirits made it their business to fan it into a flame.

A few days went on. One evening Sam Shuck posted himself in an angle formed by the wall at the top of Daffodil's Delight. It was the hour for the men to quit work ; and, as they severally passed him on their road home, Sam's arm was thrust forward, and a folded bit of paper put into their hands. A mysterious sort of missive apparently : for, on opening the paper, it was found to contain only these words, in the long, sprawling hand of Sam himself : "Barn at the back of Jim Dunn's. Seven o'clock."

Behind the house tenanted by the Dunns were premises occupied until recently by a cow-keeper. They comprised, amidst other accommodation, a large barn, or shed. Being at present empty, and to let, Sam thought he could do no better than take French leave to make use of it.

The men hurried over their tea, or supper, (some took one on leaving work for the

night, some the other, some a mixture of both, and some neither,) that they might attend to the invitation of Sam. Peter Quale was seated over a substantial dish of batter pudding, a bit of neck of mutton baked in the midst of it, when he was interrupted by the entrance of John Baxendale, who had stepped in from his own rooms next door.

"Be you a-going to this meeting, Quale?" Baxendale asked, as he took a seat.

"I don't know nothing about it," returned Peter. "I saw Slippery Sam a-giving out papers, so I guessed there was something in the wind. He took care to pass me over: I expect I'm the greatest eyesore Sam has got just now. Have a bit?" added Peter, unceremoniously, pointing to the dish before him with his knife.

"No, thank ye; I have just had tea at home. That's the paper—laying it open on the table-cloth. Sam Shuck is just now cock-a-hoop with this strike."

"He is no more cock-a-hoop than the rest of Daffodil's Delight is," struck in Mrs.

Quale, who had finished her own meal, and was at leisure to talk. "The men and women is all a-going mad together, I think, and Slippery Sam's leading 'em on. Suppose you all do strike—which is what they are hankering after—what good 'll it bring?"

"That's just it," replied Baxendale. "One can't see one's way clear. The agitation might do us some good, but it might do us a deal of harm; so that one doesn't know what to be at. Quale, I'll go to the meeting, if you will."

"If I go, it will be to give 'em a piece of my mind," retorted Peter.

"Well, it's only right that different sides should be heard. Sam 'll have it all his own way else."

"He'll manage to get that, by the appearance things wears," said Mrs. Quale, wrathfully. "How you men can submit to be led by such a fellow as him, just because his tongue is capable of persuading you that black's white, is a marvel to me. Talk of women being soft! let the men talk of their selves. Hold up a finger to 'em, and they'll

go after it : like the Swiss cows Peter read of the other day, a-flocking in a line after their leader, behind each other's tails."

"I wish I knew what was right," said Baxendale, "or which course would turn out best for us."

"I'd be off and listen to what's going on, at any rate," urged Mrs. Quale.

The barn was filling. Sam Shuck, perched upon Mrs. Dunn's washing-tub turned upside down, which had been rolled in for the occasion, greeted each group as it arrived with a gracious nod. Sam appeared to be progressing in the benefits he had boasted to his wife he should derive, inasmuch as that the dilapidated clothes had been discarded for better ones : and he stood on the tub's end in all the glory of a black frock coat, a crimson neck-tie with lace-ends, and peg-top pantaloons : the only attire (as a ready-made outfitting shop had assured him) that a gentleman could wear. Sam's eye grew less complaisant when it rested on Peter Quale, who was coming in with John Baxendale.

"This is a pleasure we didn't expect," said he.

"May be not," returned Peter Quale, drily. "The barn's open to all."

"Of course it is," glibly said Sam, putting a good face upon the matter. "All fair and above board, is our mottor: which is more than them native enemies of ours, the masters, can say: they hold their meetings in secret, with closed doors."

"Not in secret—do they?" asked Robert Darby. "I have not heard of that."

"They meet in their own homes, and they shut out strangers," replied Sam. "I'd like to know what you call that, but meeting in secret?"

"I should not call it secret; I should call it private," decided Darby, after a minute's pause, given to realise the question. "We might do the same. Our homes are ours, and we can shut out whom we please."

"Of course we *might*," contended Sam. "But we like better to be open; and if a few of us assemble together to consult on the present aspect of affairs, we do it so that

the masters, if they choose, might come and hear us. Things are not equalized in this world. Let us attempt secret meetings, and see how soon we should be looked up by the law, and accused of hatching treason and sedition, and all the rest of it. That sharp-eyed *Times* newspaper would be the first to set on us. There's one law for the masters, and another for the men."

"Is that Slippery Sam?" ejaculated a new comer, at this juncture. "Where did you get that fine new toggery, Shuck?"

The disrespectful interruption was spoken in simple surprise: no insidious meaning prompting it. Sam Shuck had appeared in ragged attire so long, that the change could not fail to be remarkable. Sam loftily turned a deaf ear to the remark, and continued his address.

"I am sure that most of you can't fail to see that things have come to a crisis in our trade. The moment that brought it, was when that great building firm refused the reasonable demands of their men; and the natural consequence of which was a strike.

Friends, I have been just *riled* ever since. I have watched you go to work day after day like tame cats, the same as if nothing had happened ; and I have said to myself : ‘Have those men of Hunter’s got souls within them, or have they got none ?’

“I don’t suppose we have parted from our souls,” struck in a voice.

“ You have parted with the feelings of them, at any rate,” rejoined Sam, beginning to dance in the excitement of contention, but remembering in time that his *terra firma* was only a creaky tub. “ What’s that you ask me ? How have you parted with them ? Why, by not following up the strike. If you possessed a grain of the independence of free men, you’d have hoisted your colours before now : what would have been the result ? Why, the men of other firms in the trade would have followed suit, and all struck in a body. It’s the only way that will bring the masters to reason : the only way by which we can hope to obtain our rights.”

“ You see there’s no knowing what would

be the end of a strike, Shuck," argued John Baxendale.

"There's no knowing what may be the inside of a pie until you cut him open," said Jim Dunn, whose politics were the same as Mr. Shuck's, red-hot for a strike. "But 'tain't many as 'ud shrink from putting in the knife to see."

The men laughed, and greeted Jim Dunn with applause.

"I put it to you all," resumed Sam, who took his share of laughing with the rest, "whether there's sense or not in what I say. Are we likely to get our grievances redressed by the masters, unless we force it? Never: not if we prayed our hearts out."

"Never," and "never," murmured sundry voices.

"What *are* our grievances?" demanded Peter Quale, putting the question in a matter-of-fact tone, as if he really asked for information.

"Listen!" ironically ejaculated Sam. "He asks what our grievances are! I'll answer you, Quale. They are many and great. Are

we not kept to work like beasts of burden, ten hours a day ? Does that leave us time for the recreation of our wearied bodies, for the improvement of our minds, for the education of our children, for the social home intercourse in the bosoms of our families ? By docking the day's labour to nine hours—or to eight, which we shall get, may be, after awhile," added Sam, with a wink—"it would leave us the extra hour, and be a blessing."

Sam carried the admiring room with him. That hard, disbelieving Peter Quale, interrupted the cheering.

"A blessing, or the conterairy, as it might turn out," cried he. "It's easy to talk of education, and self-improvement ; but how many is there that would use the accorded hour that way ? "

"Another grievance is our wages," resumed Sam, drowning the words, not caring to court discussion on what might be a weak point. "We call ourselves men, and Englishmen, and yet we lie down contented with five-and-sixpence a day. Do you know

what our trade gets in Australia ? Oh, you do, some of you ? then I'll tell those that don't. From twelve to fifteen shillings per day : and even more than that. *Twelve shillings !* and that's the minimum rate of pay," slowly repeated Sam, lifting up his arm and one peg-top to give emphasis to the words.

A murmur of envy at the coveted rate of pay in Australia shook the room to the centre.

" But the price of provisions and other necessaries is enormous in that quarter," debated Abel White. " So it may come to the same in the end—be about as broad as long. Old father and me was talking about it last night."

" If everybody went in for your old father's sentiments, we should soon be like him—in our dotage," loftily observed Sam.

" But things are dear there," persisted Sam's antagonist. " I have heard what is sometimes given for shoes there ; but I'm afraid to say, it was so much. The wages in Australia can't be any guide for us."

"No, they can't," said Peter Quale. "Australia is one place, and this is another. Where's the use of bringing up that?"

"Oh, of course not," sarcastically uttered Sam. "Anything that tends to show how we are put upon, and how we might be made more comfortable, it's of no use bringing up. The long and the short of it is this: we want to be regarded as MEN: to have our voices considered, and our plaints attended to; to be put altogether upon a better footing. Little enough is it we ask at present: only for a modicum of ease in our day's hard labour, just the thin end of the wedge inserted to give it. That's all we are agitating for. It depends upon ourselves whether we get it or not. Let us display manly courage and join the strike, and it is ours to-morrow."

The response did not come so quickly as Sam deemed it ought. He went on in a persuasive, ringing tone.

"Consider the wives of your bosoms; consider your little children; consider yourselves. Were you born into the world to be

slaves—blackymoors ; to be ground into the dust with toil ? Never."

"Never," uproariously echoed three parts of the room.

"The motto of a true man is, or ought to be, 'Do as little as you can, and get as much for it ;'" said Sam, dancing in his enthusiasm, and thereby nearly losing his perch on the tub. "With an hour's work less a day, and the afternoon holiday on the Saturday, we shall——"

"What's the good of a afternoon Saturday holiday ? We don't want that, Sam Shuck."

This ignominious interruption to the proceedings came from a lady. Buzzing round the entrance door and thrusting in their heads at a square hole, which might originally have been intended for a window, were a dozen or two of the gentler sex. This irregularity had not been unobserved by the chairman, who faced them : the chairman's audience, densely packed, had their backs that way. It was not an orthodox adjunct to a trade meeting, that was certain, and the

chairman would probably have ordered the ladies away, had he deemed there was a chance of his getting obeyed ; but too many of them had the reputation of being the grey mares. So he winked at the irregularity, and had added one or two flourishes of oratory for their especial ears. The interruption came from Mrs. Cheek, Timothy Cheek's wife.

“ What's the good of a afternoon Saturday holiday ? We don't want that, Sam Shuck. Just when we be up to our eyes in muck and cleaning, our places routed out till you can't see the colour of the boards, for brooms, and pails, and soap and water, and the chairs and things is all topsy-turvy, one upon another, so as the children have to be sent out to grub in the gutter, for there ain't no place for 'em indoors, do you think we want the men poking their noses in ? No ; and they'd better not try it on. Women have got tempers given to 'em as well as you.”

“ And tongues too,” rejoined Sam, unmindful of the dignity of his office.

“ It is to be hoped they have,” retorted

Mrs. Cheek, not inclined to be put down ; and her sentiments appeared to be warmly joined in by the ladies generally. "Don't you men go a agitating for the Saturday's half-holiday ! What 'ud you do with it, do you suppose ? Why, just sot it away at the publics."

Some confusion ensued ; and the women were peremptorily ordered to mind their own business, and "make theirselves scarce," which not one of them attempted to obey. When the commotion had subsided, a very respectable man took up the discourse—George Stevens.

"The gist of the whole question is this," he said : "Will agitation do us good, or will it do us harm ? We look upon ourselves as representing one interest ; the masters consider they represent another. If it comes to open warfare between the two, the strongest would win."

"In other words, whichever side's funds held out the longest," said Robert Darby. "That is as I look upon it."

"Just so," returned Stevens. "I cannot

say, seeing no farther than we can see at present, that a strike would be advisable."

"Stevens, do you want to better yourself, or not?" asked Sam Shuck.

"I'd be glad enough to better myself, if I saw my way clear to do it," was the reply. "But I don't."

"We don't want no strikes," struck in a shockheaded hard-working man. "What is it we want to strike for? We have got plenty of work, and full wages. A strike won't fill our pockets. Them may wote for strikes that like 'em; I'll keep to my work."

Partial applause.

"It is as I said," cried Sam. "There's poor, mean-spirited creatures among you, as won't risk the loss of a day's pay for the common good, or put out a hand to help the less fortunate. I'd rather be buried alive, five feet under the earth, than I'd show out so selfish."

"What is the interest of one of us is the interest of all," observed Stevens. "And a strike, if we went into it, would either benefit

us all in the end, or make us all suffer. It is sheer nonsense to attempt to make out that one man's interest is different from another's ; our interests are the same. I'd vote for striking to-morrow, if I were sure we should come out of it with whole skins, and get what we struck for : but I must see that a bit clearer first."

"How can we get it, unless we try for it ?" demanded Sam. "If the masters find we're all determined, they'll give in to us. I appeal to you all"—raising his hands over the room—"whether the masters can do without us ?"

"That has got to be seen," said Peter Quale significantly. "One thing is plain : we could not do without them."

"Nor they without us—nor they without us," struck in voices from various parts of the barn.

"Then why shilly-shally about the question of a strike ?" asked Sam of the barn, in a glib tone of reason. "If a universal strike were on, the masters would pretty soon make terms that would end it. Why, a six

months' strike would drive half of them into the *Gazette* ——”

“But it might drive us into the workhouse at the same time,” interrupted John Baxendale.

“Let me finish,” went on Sam; “it's not perlite to take up a man in the middle of a sentence. I say that a six months' strike would send many of the masters to the bankruptcy court. Well now, there has been a question debated among us”—Sam lowered his voice—“whether it would not be policy to let things go on quietly, as they are, till next spring——”

“A question among who?” interposed Peter Quale, regardless of the reproof just administered to John Baxendale.

“Never you mind who,” returned Sam, with a wink: “among those that are hard at work for your interest. With their contracts for the season signed, and their works in full progress, say about next May, then would be the time for a strike to tell upon the masters. However, it has been thought better not to delay it. The future's but an

uncertainty : the present is ours, and so must the strike be. *Have you wives ?*" he pathetically continued ; "*have you children ? have you spirits of your own ?* Then you will all, with one accord, go in for the strike."

"But what are our wives and children to do while the strike is on ?" asked Robert Darby. "You say yourself it might last six months, Shuck. Who would support them ?"

"Who !" rejoined Sam, with an indignant air, as if the question were a superfluous one. "Why the Trades' Unions, of course. *That's* all settled. The Unions are prepared to take care of all who are out on strike, standing up, like brave Britons, for their privileges, and keep 'em like fighting-cocks. Hooroar for that blessed boon, the Trades' Unions !"

"Hooroar for the Trades' Unions !" was shouted in chorus. "Keep us like fighting-cocks, will they ! Hooroar !"

"Much good you'll get from the Trades' Unions !" burst forth a dissentient voice. "They are the greatest pests as ever was allowed in a free country."

The opposition caused no little commotion. Standing by the door, having pushed his way through the surrounding women, who had *not* made themselves "scarce," was a man in a flannel jacket, a cap in his hand, and his head white with mortar. He was looking excited as he spoke.

"This is not regular," said Sam Shuck, displaying authority. "You have no business here : you don't belong to us."

"Regular or irregular, I'll speak my mind," was the answer. "I have been at work for Jones the builder, down yonder. I have done my work steady and proper, and I have had my pay. A man comes up to me yesterday and says, 'You must join the Trades' Union.' 'No,' says I, 'I shan't ; I don't want nothing of the Trades' Union, and the Union don't want nothing of me.' So they goes to my master. 'If you keep on employing this man, your other men will strike,' they says to him ; and he, being in a small way, got intimidated, and sent me off to-day. And here I am, throwed out of work, and I have got a sick wife and nine

young children to keep. Is that justice? or is it tyranny? Talk about emancipating the slaves! let us emancipate ourselves at home."

"Why don't you join the Union?" cried Sam. "All do, who are good men and true."

"All good men and true *don't*," dissented the man. "Many of the best workmen among us won't have anything to do with Unions; and you know it, Sam Shuck."

"Just clear out of this," said Sam.

"When I've had my say," returned the man; "not before. If I would join the Union, I can't. To join it, I must pay five shillings, and I have not got them to pay. With such a family as mine, you may guess every shilling is forestalled afore it comes in. I kept myself to myself, doing my work in quiet, and interfering with nobody. Why should they interfere with me?"

"If you have been in full work, five shillings is not much to pay to the Union," sneered Sam.

"If I had my pockets filled with five-shilling pieces, I would not pay one to it,"

fearlessly retorted the man. "Is it right that a free-born Englishman should give in to such a system of intimidation? No: I never will. You talk of the masters being tyrants: it's you who are the tyrants, one to another. What is one workman better than his fellow, that he should lay down laws and say, You shall do this, and you shall do that, or you shan't be allowed to work at all? That rule you want to get passed—that a skilled, thorough workman shouldn't do a full day's work because some of his fellows can't—who's agitating for it? Why, naturally those that can't or won't do the full work. Would an honest, capable man go in for it? Of course he'd not. I tell you what"—turning his eyes on the room—"the Trades' Unions have been called a protection to the working man; but, if you don't take care, they'll grow into a curse. When Sam Shuck, and other good-for-naughts like him, what never did a full week's work for their families yet, are paid in gold and silver to spread incendiaryism among you, it's time you looked to yourselves."

He turned away as he spoke ; and Sam, in a dance of furious passion, danced off his tub. The interlude had not tended to increase the feeling of the men in Sam's favour —that is, in the cause he advocated. Not a man present but wanted to better himself could he do so with safety, but they were afraid to enter on aggressive measures. Indiscriminate talking ensued ; diverse opinions were disputed, and the meeting was prolonged to a late hour. Finally the men dispersed as they came, nothing having been resolved upon. A few set their faces resolutely against the proposed strike ; a few were red-hot for it ; but the majority were undecided, and liable to be swayed either way.

"It will come," nodded Sam Shuck, as he went home to a supper of pork chops and gin-and-water.

But Sam was destined to be—as he would have expressed it—circumvented. It cannot be supposed that this unsatisfactory state of things was unnoticed by the masters : and they took their measures accordingly. Form-

ing themselves into an association, they discussed the measures best to be adopted, and determined upon a lock-out ; that is, to close their yards until the firm, whose workmen had struck, should resume work. They also resolved to employ only those men who would sign an agreement, or memorandum, affirming that they were not connected with any society which interfered with the arrangements of the master whose service they entered, or with the hours of labour, and acknowledging the rights both of masters and men to enter into any trade arrangements on which they might mutually agree. This paper of agreement was not relished by the men at all ; they styled it “the odious document.” Neither was the lock-out relished : it was of course equivalent, in one sense, to a strike ; only that the initiative had come from the masters’ side, and not from theirs. It commenced early in August. Some of the masters closed their works without a word of explanation to their men : in one sense it was not needed, for the men knew of the measure beforehand. Mr. Hunter

chose to assemble them together, and state what he was about to do. Somewhat of his old energy appeared to have been restored to him for the moment, as he stood before them and spoke — Austin Clay by his side.

" You have brought it upon yourselves," he said, in answer to a remark from one who boldly, but respectfully, asked whether it was fair to resort to a lock-out, and so punish all alike, contents and non-contents. " I will meet the question upon your own grounds. When the Messrs. Pollocks' men struck because their demands, to work nine hours a day, were not acceded to, was it not in contemplation that you should join them—that the strike should be universal ? Come, answer me candidly."

The men, true and honest, did not deny it.

" And possibly by this time you would have struck," said Mr. Hunter. " How much more ' fair ' would that have been towards us, than this locking-out is towards you ? Do you suppose that you alone are to meet and pass your laws, saying you will coerce

the masters, and that the masters will not pass laws in return ? Nonsense, my men !”

A pause.

“ When have the masters attempted to interfere with your privileges, either by saying that your day’s toil shall consist of longer hours, or by diminishing your wages, and threatening to turn you off if you do not fall in with the alteration ? Never. Masters have rights as well as men : but some of you, of late, have appeared to ignore the fact. Let me ask you another question : Were you well treated under me, or were you not ? Have I shown myself solicitous for your interests, for your welfare ? Have I ever oppressed you, ever put upon you ?”

No, Mr. Hunter had never sought to oppress them : they acknowledged it freely. He had ever been a good master.

“ My men, let me give you my opinion. While condemning your conduct, your semblance of discontent—it has been semblance, rather than reality—I have been sorry for you, for it is not with you that the chief blame lies. You have suffered evil per-

suaders to get access to your ears, and have been led away by their pernicious counsels. The root of the evil lies there. I wish you could bring your own good sense to bear upon these points, and to see with your own eyes. If so, there will be nothing to prevent our resuming together amicable relations; and for my own part, I care not how soon the time shall come. The works are for the present closed."

END OF VOL I.

